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Wanderings in Italy

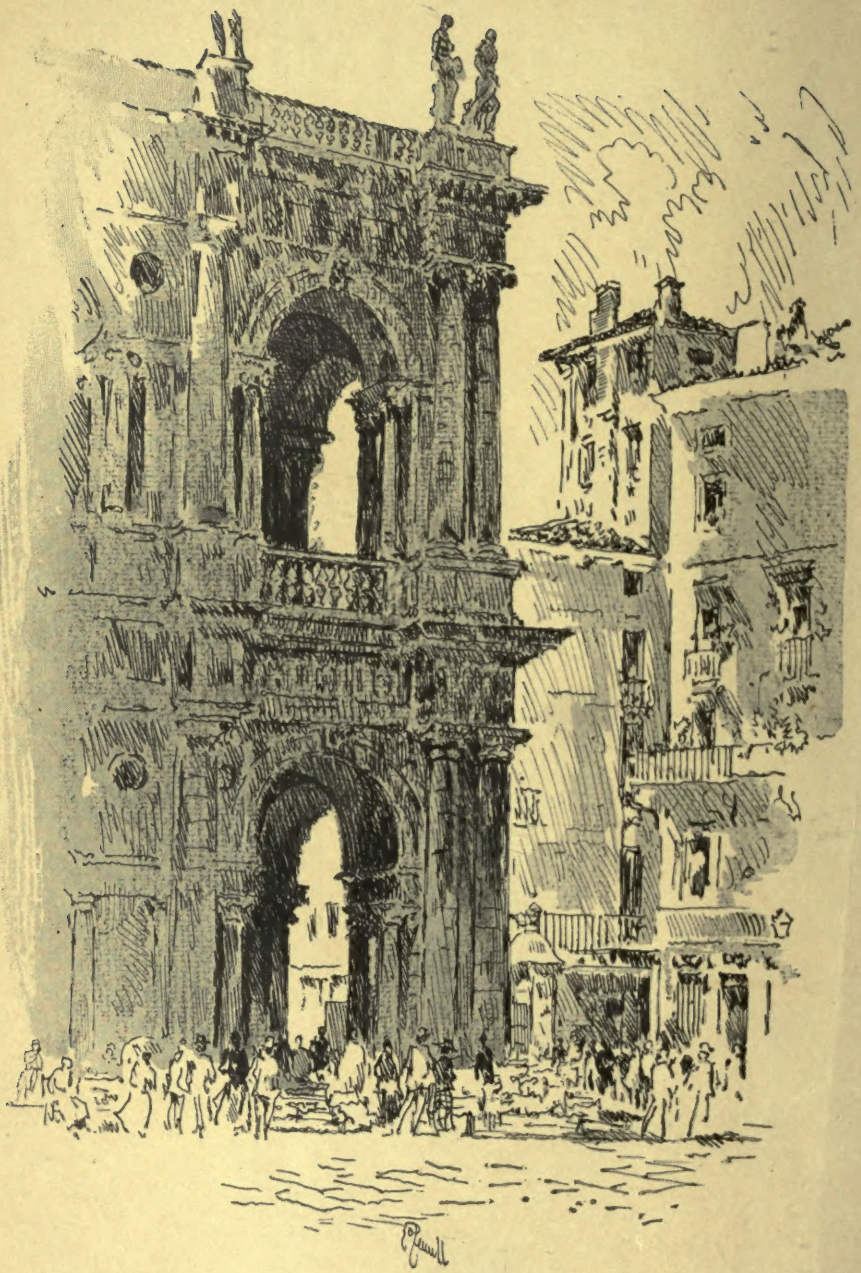












VICENZA, A PALLADIAN CORNER



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# Wanderings in Italy

BY

GABRIEL FAURE

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

AMONG the innumerable volumes devoted to Italy none has had more appreciative recognition in France than M. Gabriel Faure's *Heures d'Italie*. No writer has more delicately suggested the enchantment of the Latin land and the spell it casts over the traveller, and none takes us more persuasively off the beaten track to lead us to sanctuaries of art and beauty so little known to the ordinary tourist as Castelfranco, Pieve di Cadore and Saronno. M. Faure is an ideal guide for the educated pilgrim. He has a genuine love of Nature and a painter's eye for scenery. But he does not merely evoke the picturesque. His wide reading and artistic culture are evident on every page, and the happy allusion, the apt quotation and the romantic incident perpetually stimulate the reader. Now when we may hope once more to visit the delightful land an English version of this distinguished book, completed by notes on the *terra redenta*, should be welcome.



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PART I

PIEDMONT-LOMBARDY





# WANDERINGS IN ITALY

## CHAPTER I

### ORTA

OFTEN when entering Italy by the Simplon, I had thought of making a slight *détour* and stopping at Orta. But my eagerness to reach Milan and Venice had always prevented this. As, however, this year I have not the leisure necessary for the delights of early autumn on the lagoon, I will turn the few days of liberty at my disposal to good account by visiting certain nooks and corners around the lakes which are unknown to me. Surely in this region, as throughout Latin territory, there must be exquisite scenery and interesting sanctuaries of art.

Accordingly, at Domodossola I left the express train which brings the traveller so swiftly to the Italian descent, that for a moment he is dazzled by the splendour of the sudden light, and I boarded a little train, the carriages of which seemed antediluvian after the luxurious sleeping car. It follows the old line of Novara, which one used to take in former days



on arriving by the Simplon diligence. The direct line to Lake Maggiore was not laid till after the opening of the tunnel. For some fifteen miles, the two railways run side by side, and some of the stations are indeed common to both. They part company at Cuzzago, and after crossing the Tosa and skirting the western base of Mottarone, we came out on Lake Orta, the ancient Cusio of the Romans.

A spot of infinite sweetness and charm ! I am not sure, indeed, whether it is not the most perfect of all the Lombard lakes—for it may be included in the Lombard group, although, like the greater and more beautiful part of Maggiore, it is in Piedmontese territory. Less wild than Lugano, less voluptuous than Lario, less grandiose than Maggiore, it has more general harmony than any one of them. All the proportions are absolutely right ; there is not a discordant note. The wooded hills surrounding it follow the curves best adapted to the windings of the shores ; we cannot believe that the same hand drew these supple lines and the harsh profile of the mountains which seem to be thrusting back rude Germany into another world. Its island of San Giulio summarises all the various beauties of the Borromean isles. The point of Orta is hardly less graceful than the promontory of Bellagio. And the Lake has preserved a quality which is gradually passing away from its more illustrious rivals as they are invaded, transformed and disfigured by civilisation, namely : the calm of Nature. For hours one may listen to the lapping of the waters without hearing the vibrations of motor engines ; a single small steamer suffices for the service of the ports. The automobiles that venture so far from the highway as the quay of Orta are very few in number. It is one of the last corners in Italy left unspoilt by modernism and progress.

But, alas ! this will not be true for long ! The dwellers on its shores wish to attract tourists ; they form Committees of enterprise ; they are annoyed to hear their lake called *Cenerentola* (Cinderella), because it lies forgotten among its elder sisters. Before they have realised their ambitions let us enjoy the peace of a region where very soon the quiet languor of autumn days will be a memory of the past.

At present Orta is the ideal refuge of dreamers and *real* lovers. A haunt of peace, everything here invites to tenderness, without that perpetual beckoning of pleasure which makes Como so attractive to those who seek the illusion of love. Here, far from the crowd, one does not feel, as on the shores of Bellagio and Cadenabbia, that kind of external fascination and diffusion of individuality which makes one half unconscious and induces a certain intoxication. Here one spends days that seem empty days when nothing happens, but which will seem beautiful later because they were made up of happiness. We get used to happiness as to health so rapidly that we cease to notice it. The more saturated with it is the air we breathe, the more we assume that we have never breathed any other. Rather should we take note of our joys each evening, and mark with a white stone the hours when life was sweet and good !

Orta is delightfully situated at the foot of a sort of mountainous promontory, which leaves but scanty space for houses at its base on the shores of the lake. The little town is indeed but one long street parallel with the bank, interrupted in the middle by a shady piazza with a tiny town-hall. The slopes of the hills are studded with rich villas embowered in the luxuriant vegetation to be found in all the sheltered corners of the Italian lakes. Rhododendrons and azaleas of



unusual vigour must show as magnificent bouquets of bloom in the spring. Ivory-petalled blossoms still linger among the polished leaves of the magnolias. In spite of a three months' drought, the trees are green; the oleander especially, that lover of sultry summers, displays its sumptuous blossoms. The *olea fragrans* begins to perfume the gardens. By the roadside, fig-trees send forth their pungent odour; between their broad leaves we catch sight of the glistening waters and of the little island of San Giulio, smiling and quivering in the brilliant light.

A boat will take us across to it in a few minutes. The glamour increases as we approach. Terraces and gardens seem to be hanging in space over the lake, in which the belfry and the high walls of the seminary are reflected to a great depth. The verdure of the foliage that enframes the houses gives an air of gaiety to the little island, the centre of a commune comprising several villages on the western and southern shores of the lake. As it contains the town-hall, the church and the burial ground, wedding and funeral processions come hither by boat as at Venice. The space is so restricted that buildings rise one above the other, and not an inch of ground is wasted. A single narrow street, or rather path between walls runs round the island. The general effect is highly picturesque. If Orta be doomed to disfigurement some day, here, I hope, is a corner which will perforce remain unchanged for a long time.

The basilica of San Giulio is an interesting church, founded, according to local tradition, in the fourth century. Some parts of it indeed—columns, capitals, bas-reliefs and frescoes—are very old. The most remarkable feature is a Romanesque pulpit of black marble, on which are carved the attributes of the



LAKE ORTA, WITH ISLAND OF SAN GIULIO.





Four Evangelists and two curious panels representing Christianity and Paganism, under the respective symbols of a griffin and a crocodile, alternately triumphing the one over the other. If this interpretation given me by the custodian be correct, the sculptor was an artist with a prudent eye to the future. There are numerous frescoes on pillars and vaults. The best, by Gaudenzio Ferrari, entirely cover one of the chapels. On the end wall: *The Virgin surrounded by Saints* and *The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen*; on the ceiling, the *Four Evangelists*; in the vault, four *Prophets*; on the pillars of one side, *Saint Michael* and *Saint Apollonia*, and on the other, *Saint Julius* and one of his *Companions*. The figures, as Burckhardt has already said, are finely executed. But it is to be regretted that they were superposed on earlier works, traces of which are still to be seen. Indeed in certain places we see remnants of primitive decorations over which two subsequent paintings have been laid. It is very desirable that an attempt should be made to bring these old Gothic and Romanesque decorations once more to light, and to transfer Ferrari's works, which have suffered greatly from the ravages of time, and the folly of visitors who have scribbled their names upon them. We may console ourselves with the thought that this is not a vandalism peculiar to our own times; the custodian showed me with pride inscriptions of 1536 and 1541, that is to say, almost contemporary with the work itself. He then wished to take me into the crypt where the body of Saint Julius rests, and into the sacristy to see the bone of a monstrous serpent: for there is a legend that the island was long uninhabitable owing to the reptiles which swarmed in it. However, I took advantage of a moment when he went forward to meet some fresh visitors to steal away



from him. Outside there was a radiant blaze of sunshine. Not often do we see a day so pure and so luminous. Hills and villages were reflected with the utmost precision on the unruffled surface of the lake. The water is a smooth green suggesting molten emeralds, and recalling Dante's beautiful simile: *fresco smeraldo allorache si fiacca*.<sup>1</sup> The garden scents were wafted in warm gusts of sudden sweetness, sometimes so intense that the boat seemed to be passing through a perfumed cloud.

But day was beginning to fade, and I hoped before evening to climb the wooded hillside which forms a headland on the lake, and culminates in a Sacro Monte, of which there are so many in this region. Its twenty chapels, in which painted terra-cotta groups set forth the life of Saint Francis of Assisi are not very remarkable; but their surroundings are exquisite. They stand in a sort of park which crowns the summit; at each turn in the walks there are views of different parts of the lake. The traveller instinctively recalls the paths of the Villa Serbelloni which overhang the three arms of Lake Lario in turn; but here the effect is more austere, because there are so many religious symbols and so few flowers. The very trees seem to take on a certain solemnity. Huge pines with trunks straight and smooth as columns rise in the soft twilight air, a fraternal race, vibrating to the same breezes and quivering with the same tremors. The little white chapels seem to be leaning against the sturdy pillars of their cathedral. A noble quietude reigns on this summit whence the eye surveys the whole panorama. The villages that nestle at the foot of the slopes are already blurred by the blue dust of twilight. The lake sinks into the bottom of the dark cup of mountains

<sup>1</sup> Green as an emerald freshly broken.

which encircle it with their harmonious lines. On the further shore, above Pella, which slumbers in its woods of chestnut and walnut, rises the utmost peak of Mount Rosa.

Together with the falling darkness, I descend towards Orta, to the *albergo* whose embowered terrace dominates the town. Gradually silky veils are drawn across the sky. A fine mist rises from the overheated earth, softens all contours, and wraps things in a supple mantle of velvet. The hills seem at once to advance and to recede. The twinkle of stars animates the glistening waters, and a moon in its first quarter throws a thin track of fire across them. Here and there a light quivers on the quay of Orta. The dim trees slumber motionless in the languid air.

## CHAPTER II

### SARONNO

I HAD also long wished to visit Saronno, for here one really learns to know Luini, the good Luini, whose gentle, rhythmic name so aptly evokes the poetry of the lakes on whose shores he was born and lived and died. Nowhere else has he left so many frescoes; and he is above all a *frescante*. He who judges Luini only by his easel pictures knows not the true genius of the artist, who was unable to pour out his tender, ardent, spontaneous soul within their narrow limits.

It is true that at Milan one can get an idea of his art from the works in San Maurizio, in the Brera, where



there are numerous fragments, notably the admirable *Entombment of Saint Catherine*, and in S. Maria della Passione, the church, whose rococo façade bears the half obliterated inscription immortalised by Maurice Barrès : *Amori et dolori sacrum*.<sup>1</sup> We gain a deeper insight into it at Lugano, in the modest church of S. Maria degli Angeli, where he painted his largest composition on the wall of the rood-screen. The many episodes of the Passion are represented in full, and more than five hundred persons figure in the various scenes. The general effect is a little cold, and we are conscious of the difficulty the artist must have had in co-ordinating a composition so complex and dramatic ; but there are exquisite details, and Luini rarely conceived more touching figures than the pathetic Saint John making his promise to the dying Saviour, or the Magdalen kneeling at the foot of the Cross and smiling in ecstasy through her golden hair.

The space to be covered at Saronno was even greater ; but it was divided up into a series of panels and the painter was able to distribute his work as he pleased. Untrammelled by a time limit, or, it would seem, by any pre-determined programme, Luini was governed by no rule but that of his own imagination. He put his whole self into the work, with all his qualities and all his defects.

To get to Saronno, one has to cross a corner of the Lombard plain, on those dusty roads which soon become monotonous, because they run for the most part through two green hedges. This fertile country would be a beautiful sight . . . if one could see it, as said Abbé Coyer, who sighed for the highways of France, where the trees which adorn and shade them do not obscure the prospect. Still, there are delightful corners, and idyllic

<sup>1</sup> A shrine for love and pain.

landscapes, notably where the thick ribbon of vine-branches winds on either side of the road, hanging from tree to tree. These vines clinging to elms have inspired poets throughout the ages; Ovid invoked them in one of the pieces in his *Amores* to express his fondness and his regrets in the absence of Corinna:

Ulmus amat vitem, vitis non deserit ulmum

Separor a domina cur ego sæpe mea? <sup>1</sup>

On this September morning when summer is in its death-throes, a delicate light plays in the atmosphere and floats in gentle waves over the autumnal landscape. The magnificent plane-trees, a double avenue of which leads from the town of Saronno to the church, are bathed in a golden light. The traveller treads on a thick carpet of dead leaves; there is something melancholy and bitter in their slightly acrid scent.

And here we have one of those delectable sanctuaries of art, in which we discover the soul of an artist under an insignificant or mediocre exterior. There have been hardly any changes here for four centuries; cosmopolitan snobbery has not yet found its way here; and the student may spend long hours undisturbed by tourists or guides.

The whole of the end of the church was decorated by Luini. First, there are two figures of saints: *S. Roch* and *S. Sebastian*; in the passage leading to the choir: *The Marriage of the Virgin* and *Jesus among the Doctors*; in the choir itself: *The Adoration of the Magi* and *The Presentation in the Temple*; on the pendentives and the upper walls: *The Sibyls*, *The Evangelists* and *The Fathers of the Church*; in a little sacristy behind the choir: *S. Catherine* and *S. Apollonia* and on pieces of canted wall, two angels bearing a cup

<sup>1</sup> The elm loves the vine and the vine will not leave the elm. Why should I be so often parted from my mistress?



and a chalice ; finally, in a passage in the cloisters : *The Nativity*.

Contemplating Luini's works, I am nearly always conscious of three successive impressions. First, a sense of delight which the general harmony of tints and colours gives to the eye. As I entered the choir, the word *delicious* sprang to my lips. Then, as I looked more carefully, disillusionment began : I thought the groups confused, the faces often inexpressive, the perspective mostly false. The landscapes which had charmed me at the first glance are badly constructed, and sometimes a little ridiculous : in the *Presentation in the Temple* the mound on which stands the church of Saronno shaded by a sickly palm-tree, is really childish in composition ; in the *Adoration of the Magi*, the string of animals loaded with odd little valises attests a puerility bordering on the grotesque. The heads are often commonplace and the attitudes rigid ; even the figure of Mary in the *Adoration of the Magi* and the *Marriage of the Virgin* is insignificant and wholly without character. But when, after examining the works in detail, I stand back and try to sum up a general impression, Luini triumphs once more. There are so many charming tones so cunningly graduated, so much sweetness and suavity everywhere, that I can no longer criticise. I am conquered, as I am by a certain kind of music the defects and mediocrity of which I recognise, but which captivates me by the very first bar when I hear it. I no longer notice the faults which shocked me ; my eye lingers only on the exquisite things which Luini has lavished here as elsewhere. In the *Adoration of the Magi*, for instance, I forget the poor arrangement of the groups in my admiration for a beautiful page with a Leonardesque head, and for the little

angels of the vault. It was in isolated figures such as these that Luini always excelled. And I would willingly give the great frescoes of the choir for the *S. Catherine* or the *Angels* of the sacristy.

Nowhere are the soul of the painter, his sweet and tender philosophy, his smiling faith, more clearly manifested than here. It seems as if in this sanctuary somewhat remote from the world he had escaped more than was his wont from the yoke of Leonardo, and had allowed his own heart to speak. We divine what Luini might have become if he had been left to himself; and think that had Leonardo never come to Milan, its school might have risen to the same heights as the other Italian schools, and might have found in Luini a master equal to Titian, Correggio or Raphael. But the great Florentine had only to appear and he triumphed. All original inspiration was checked. The qualities of health, grace and vigour characteristic of the old Lombard masters vanished as by magic before a glory which at once became a tyranny. Artists thought only of imitating the inimitable; thenceforth they never painted a face without giving it the smile and the enigmatic eyes of *La Gioconda*. This influence is so strong in Luini's pictures, that several of them were long attributed to Da Vinci.

In his frescoes, on the other hand, Luini contrived to preserve his independence to a much greater degree. Nothing, indeed, differs more essentially from the slowly conceived and minutely retouched work of the subtle Leonardo than the swift, spontaneous art of fresco, where the painter has to work on the fresh plaster which allows neither of hesitation nor corrections. The one master strove to suggest on his canvas the most mysterious sentiments of the soul, and to express all the complicated learning of his brain; the other



covered the walls of churches after the manner of a simple and faithful craftsman who loved his art and lived for it alone. Luini was no intellectual; he produced his works as the beautiful trees of his country yield their luscious fruits. This is more especially evident in his youthful works, when he had as yet experienced no foreign influence, as, for instance, in that *Bath of the Nymphs*, the free and very modern handling of which sometimes recalls Puvis de Chavannes and Renoir. There is an innocent charm about these maidens emerging from the bath or disrobing to enter it. Their muscular limbs, their supple, velvety skin, everything about them proclaim the joy of life under happy skies. At a time when war and pestilence were ravaging the province, he contrived to live at Milan in a kind of dream, so obscurely that we know little of his biography beyond what may be gleaned from the dates on his canvases and frescoes. Either from necessity, as tradition has it, or perhaps simply from a love of quietude, he preferred a life in the calm retreat of monasteries, where, no doubt for sums paltry but sufficient to free him from material cares, he could give himself up entirely to his beloved calling, *la mirabile e clarissima arte di pittura*.<sup>1</sup> He loved more especially the sanctuary of Saronno, where he seems to have made two long sojourns. Nowhere, at any rate, even before the vast fresco of the rood-screen at Lugano, have I felt so near to him as here. As long ago as October 4, 1816, Stendhal came to see these "touching" frescoes, which he declares he "admired so greatly." How could he have said on another occasion, in reference to Lombard beauty, that "no great painter has immortalised it by his pictures, as Correggio immortalised the beauty

<sup>1</sup> "The admirable and lucid art of painting."

of Romagna and Andrea del Sarto that of Florence"? I think, on the contrary, that Luini has perfectly expressed the beauty described by Manzoni: *molle a un tratto e maestosa che brilla nel sangue lombardo*,<sup>1</sup> and especially in those women with opulent forms, languorous eyes, quivering nostrils and fresh cheeks like ripe fruits.

When he spoke thus Stendhal seems to have forgotten Leonardo da Vinci, who, coming from the suave but somewhat austere Tuscany, felt the seduction of Lombardy intensely, and fixed the sensual grace of her youths on his canvases. True, he added to this the subtle idealism and the love of eloquence which are the essence of Florentine art. Each artist interprets reality through his personal vision. A truism often repeated and expressed by Goethe in a form which loses in translation: "Reality is the fertilising soil in which flourishes the marvellous plant of art, whose roots must strike down into the real, but whose stem must blossom in the ideal." The stem flowers at a greater or a lesser height, according to temperament. Luini's blossoms are within reach of our hands; we can easily gather them and inhale their perfumes.

### CHAPTER III

#### NOVARA

WHY had I hitherto felt distrustful of Novara? There are towns, just as there are persons, whom we

<sup>1</sup> "At once soft and majestic, which shines in the Lombard race."

instinctively avoid for years, and finally regret having left unknown so long, when chance brings us acquainted with them. I imagined Novara as a dreary, commonplace town of the Piedmontese plain, far from mountains and rivers, crowned by a hideous cathedral, and interesting chiefly as possessing an excellent buffet with famous cellars in a great railway station always crowded with trains, at the junction of numerous lines.

This year, being forced by my itinerary to spend several hours there, I determined to explore it hastily. And now I have spent two most agreeable days there, lodged in an old hotel into one room of which one might easily put a whole Parisian flat, and where the cooking and the wines were first-rate. The town is cheerful and well built; and as the walks are delightful, I was consoled for the scarcity of works of art.

There are, it is true, an ancient Baptistery and a Romanesque church; unfortunately, there is scarcely anything left of the primitive basilica, which has gradually been transformed into a rich modern building, with an atrium of Corinthian columns in Simplon granite. There is also the church of San Gaudenzio with the famous belfry by Antonelli of which the Novarese are so proud—a structure almost as ugly as the building by the same architect at Turin. I might further have found in the churches and public galleries some pictures by Ferrari; but it would have been futile to seek out second-rate examples of the master when on my way to Varallo. I preferred to loiter in the little streets and above all, to take a walk round the town.

Among the numerous Italian cities which have transformed their ancient fortifications into shady avenues, not one has solved the problem more successfully. Here we have not merely a circular boulevard planted



with chestnut trees which are burnt up by the summer heat, and present a lamentable appearance in September, but a superb girdle of gardens and lawns with splendid trees. About the ivy-covered red walls of the ruined castle one may wander as in the alleys of an ancient park. North and west, the view extends as far as the line of the great Alps that spread out fan-wise around the Lombard plain ; the panorama is almost the same as that we see from the roof of Milan Cathedral. Here, indeed, the majestic mass of Mount Rosa is even more sharply defined ; when the atmosphere has been cleared by a storm, its peaks stand out against the azure with the precision of a piece of goldsmith's work. Sometimes in the warm hours of the day when the foremost mountains are bathed in mist, it emerges alone, like some dream summit set in a mysterious ocean ; and in the evening, when the blue shadow is creeping over the plain, it flames fantastically, a fiery flower in the twilight.

The fall of day, seen from these ramparts of Novara, is full of serenity. And the evenings are delicious in these nocturnal gardens propitious to intertwined shadows, at moments when the desire latent in every soul for the help of another soul to still the anguish of solitude before the mystery of things awakens. Round the old trees half stript of their leaves and the withered grasses hovers the odour of autumn, the very melancholy of which attunes the soul to love.

## CHAPTER IV

## VARALLO

NOTHING could be more delightful than the journey from Novara to Varallo. The traveller passes first through the deep undulations of the rice fields, the close, heavy ears of which are lying in swathes, like a stormy sea suddenly congealed. A gentle light silvers the morning landscape and plays through the fine mist so characteristic both of Lower Piedmont and the Lombard plain, where, as Michelet says : " fever and dream seem to hover." The mountains on the horizon are dimly seen ; the snowy outline of the Alps is barely distinguishable.

Towards Romagnano the hills begin suddenly, and very soon increase in height. The route rejoins the Sesia, and follows its course as far as Varallo. This valley, one of the loveliest of those which descend from the chain of Monte Rosa, is both fertile and industrial. Fruit trees, lusty vines heavily garlanded, and forests of chestnut trees cover the country with verdure. There are few isolated farms, but many big market-towns, prosperous and inviting of aspect after the Italian fashion. Tacitus in his *Germania* noted that the inhabitants of the further slopes of the Alps space out their houses, whereas the Latins group them together as much as possible to form villages. always with an eye to regularity and general effect. The Latin ideal has ever been urban life, the city. All the amiable and social instinct of the race is manifested in this grouping, which affords greater facility of existence and more opportunity for gaiety. The inhabitants we encounter on the road or in the villages

are healthy, well-to-do, and full of the joy of life. The peasant women wear curious costumes of brilliant colours; they smile as they pass or salute us with a gracious gesture. One feels that all these folks love the sun and that a few drops of rain or a little fog would suffice to drive them indoors. The Italians might adopt the device I have read on certain sun-dials : *Sine sole silio*.<sup>1</sup>

After leaving Borgosesia the mountains close in; the valley becomes more picturesque. And soon Varallo appears, superbly placed. Its cheerful roofs are clustered together at the bottom of the gorge, dominated by verdant hills set against lofty mountains. The appearance of the town is very individual. Although it is quite close to Monte Rosa, it is unlike the usual small Alpine town. It boasts large, well-built houses, important shops, open-air markets well stocked with flowers and fruit. There are also comfortable modern hotels, but none of these can rival the ancient hostelry which had been recommended to me, a house which still deserves its centenarian fame. Here the traveller takes his meals on a terrace with old world decorations shaded by Virginian creeper, and overhanging the Sesia, just at its point of junction with the Mastallone torrent, whose famous trout figure on every bill of fare. But, indeed, everything here is delicious: fish, partridges, peaches, grapes as fragrant as those of my native place, that valley of the Drôme dear to the epicure, where Dauphiny and Provence meet to offer the rich produce of their soil. Once again I note many affinities between my own land and the Alpine regions situated at the same altitudes of from twelve to twenty-four hundred feet. Last year these impressed me in Cadore, whence Titian sent to his beloved Aretino

<sup>1</sup> Without sun I am silent.



game and fruit which were the pride of the daintiest table in Venice.

Varallo's chief title to fame lies in its Sacro Monte, which is the most important and the most curious of all the sanctuaries in the district. It rises above the town, on the summit of a wooded hill where it forms a veritable city. Seen from the valley on approaching Varallo, it recalls those little towns of Tuscany and Umbria whose white walls crown the olive-clad hill-sides. The monk who instituted the pilgrimage to the sanctuary, at the close of the fifteenth century, dreamed of making it the New Jerusalem, and the mountain on which it stands was to represent Golgotha to the eyes of the faithful. The ascent takes half an hour by a somewhat rugged road full of sharp pebbles, but shaded by the most venerable chestnut trees in existence. Nothing could be more beautiful than these groves of chestnuts, hundreds of years old, which adorn the Piedmontese Alps. The air and the light circulate freely under their broad leaves; between their trunks, so robust that nothing can grow near them, there is no brushwood, none of those damp spots encumbered by a parasitic vegetation, where one divines a crawling world of reptiles and insects; the shadow is clear and translucent, and only the sun pierces it with golden rays through the branches.

From the summit the view extends over the whole of Valsesia and the heights that dominate it. I must confess that I preferred to enjoy this panorama rather than to examine each of the forty-five chapels, where the various episodes of the life of Christ are reproduced in pitiable fashion by means of terra-cotta groups akin to wax-work figures, and frescoes. I regret that Gaudenzio Ferrari should have associated himself, by modelling a few figures and painting a few frescoes,

with these works, precursors—like those of Mazzoni and Begarelli at Modena—of the religious objects sold in the shops around Saint Sulpice. My idea in coming to Varallo, indeed, was to become better acquainted with the most famous of its sons, the excellent painter Gaudenzio Ferrari, who was born at Valduggia near by, and lived at Varallo the greater part of his life. Here, again, we have one of those artists who would be almost illustrious in any other country. But Italy is so rich that she has neglected him somewhat. His fame has scarcely spread beyond the region where, it is true, the majority of his works are still to be found. And this indeed may be one of the reasons for this neglect, for as M. Teodor de Wyzewa has observed, “the atmosphere of the Lakes fills the soul with a kind of voluptuous torpor, which makes it dread the shock of a strong artistic emotion.”

A good idea of Ferrari's talent will already have been formed by those who have seen his pictures at Novara, Cannobio and Como, his frescoes at Vercelli and the Island of Orta, and above all, the splendid cupola of Saronno, which I admired the other day, and which André Michel, in his *History of Painting*, ranks among the great achievements of Italian art, comparing it to Correggio's masterpiece at Parma. But one can only learn to know him thoroughly at Varallo, in the little church of S. Maria delle Grazie, at the foot of the Sacred Mount. Here his heart still beats, in that sunny square where his house has been preserved and where his fellow-citizens erected a statue to him, wishing, as the inscription upon it tells us, to honour him who immortalised himself *dell' arte del dipingere e del plasticare*.<sup>1</sup>

Though this formula is comprehensible on the road

<sup>1</sup> “In the arts of painting and modelling.”

to the Sacro Monte—seeing that the artist worked on a few of the statues in the chapel—it is on the whole over-ambitious. Ferrari can only claim to rank among the painters, but his place is a very honourable one; and without going so far as Lomazzo, who reckons him among the seven great masters of the period, it is but just to pay homage to his merits.

Before entering S. Maria delle Grazie, I wished to see one of his pictures which still adorns the altar of the parish church, built in the heart of the town on a rock to which one climbs by a very picturesque staircase. Burckhardt incorrectly gives his readers to understand that there are two churches, each possessing a *Marriage of Saint Catherine*; he makes a distinction between the Collegiata and San Gaudenzio, which are, in fact, the same building. The altar-piece, in six compartments, is an exquisitely harmonious work. The Christ is very beautiful; rarely has that lifeless body, which is not a corpse, since it is to rise again, been more perfectly rendered. The central compartment represents the *Marriage of S. Catherine*, and is no less remarkable in composition and colour.

But, like Luini, Gaudenzio was pre-eminently a fresco-painter, and his masterpiece is the great decoration on the rood-screen. In the chapel on the left, under this rood-screen, the *Presentation in the Temple* and the *Jesus among the Doctors* are also noticeable; but the importance of the large fresco makes it allowable to pass them over. The surface is divided into twenty-one panels illustrating the life of Christ. The general effect is by no means monotonous; each of the sacred episodes shows a wonderful variety of execution. When we examine them closely, we are almost inclined to think Ferrari superior to Luini, save in grace and design. He has greater vigour and movement. There



were passages that made me think of Signorelli, and details of daring naturalism ; I will not go so far as Corrado Ricci, and say " modernism." The torn and dirty garments of the flagellants, the attitudes of the Apostles who gaze at Jesus as He washes the feet of one of them, the effects of light in the scene of the arrest, among other things, bear witness to his researches and his constant regard for truth. He exaggerates sometimes. Thus in the panel of the *Crucifixion*, there are many futile and even ridiculous details ; the devil who is tormenting the impenitent thief and the little jumping dog in the foreground detract from the emotional effect. We see the artist swayed by the various influences brought to bear upon him, influences among which M. Teodor de Wyzewa, following Miss Ethel Halsey, has been at pains to discriminate. According to these critics, the painter at first remained faithful to his Lombard origin ; they then note in his work a new manner so distinctly German that they believe Ferrari must have worked for some months on the banks of the Rhine. I must confess that I could not trace this influence so clearly in the San Gaudenzio picture described above, which belongs to this second period. The artist then went to Parma, and fell under the enchantment of Correggio ; the angels of the *Flight into Egypt* in Como Cathedral, and the warm colour of the admirable *Ascent to Calvary* at Cannobio, leave no room for doubt on this head. Finally, at the close of his career, Ferrari, assimilating all these influences in his individual genius, produced the masterpieces at Vercelli and Saronno.

These divisions are always a little arbitrary. I think, moreover—and to me this is the secret of Ferrari's charm—that he ever remained a Lombard more or less. Having spent nearly all his life in the mountains

of Varallo and on the shores of the lakes, he preserved the flavour of his birth-place and his race. He was the last to resist the domination of Leonardo. When he died in 1546, we may say that Lombard painting had had its day.

## CHAPTER V

### VARESE

IT was not on the shores of Lake Varese, as a somewhat ambiguous phrase might lead us to suppose, that Taine longed for a country house; he never even approached its banks, and was content to view it from the road leading to Laveno. It was Lake Maggiore which so fired him that he wished to live by it; he preferred it to Como, the voluptuous beauty of which did not appeal to him. But I should have understood it had his choice fallen on the town of Varese, for it is charming, and its environs are among the most delightful spots in Lombardy. It is gay, prosperous and animated, sometimes even over-crowded on the days of its famous markets and horse-races; the Milanese have made it one of their favourite residential quarters and have built handsome villas there. As it is little known to tourists, the traveller may linger there at his ease between its festival periods, and enjoy the dignified calm of its public gardens, which are among the finest in Northern Italy. They are the park of the ancient Corte which Duke Francis III of Modena built in the eighteenth century. Planted in the old

Italian style, they have an air of noble severity. Secular hornbeams border the spacious lawns. I remember seeing them long ago in the spring, when camellias, chestnut trees, lilacs and Australian magnolias with their satiny white blossoms filled them with their youthful sweetness. Now the scents of autumn, less strong but more subtle, spread a fever through the groves. A knoll studded with firs and parasol pines in the background adds much to the character and majesty of this garden. From the terrace the view extends over the whole of Lake Varese and as far as the chain of Western Alps dominated by Monte Rosa. Turning about, we see above the roofs of the town, the Madonna del Monte, and beyond, the Campo dei Fiori, which rises 3,000 feet above the plain, an incomparable belvedere to which, sad to say, a funicular, opened within the last few days, gives access. A rack and pinion railway had already dishonoured the famous pilgrim's way of the Madonna, which in former days was climbed on foot or in bullock carts, a rough Calvary with interminable windings. The joy of the gradual ascent, and the discovery at every turning of a wider field of vision, was infinitely greater under the old conditions. The panorama from the top is magnificent. The view extends over the whole of Lombardy, as far as Milan, dimly divined on the horizon. We distinguish six lakes: to the left, Como; in front, Varese; to the right, the little lakes of Biandronno, Monate and Comabbio; finally, a long way behind them, two fragments of Maggiore. These no doubt, made up the "seven" lakes counted by Stendhal, when he exclaimed: "Magnificent sight! One may travel through all France and Germany without receiving such impressions." It is true that there are few prospects so superb, especially towards evening, when the



sheets of water gleam in the setting sun like golden reliquaries. Yet in spite of this cry of admiration, Beyle was very melancholy on that June day of 1817, so melancholy that he scarcely looked at the women who accompanied him in his walk, two of whom, at least, he declares, were very beautiful. "As I have not time to be in love with any one of them, I am in love with Italy. I cannot overcome my grief at leaving this land." No doubt he was sincere; but a memory mingled with this regret which gave it a taste of bitterness. He recalled another ascent six years before on an October morning, "when the sun rose wreathed in mists and the lower slopes looked like islands in the midst of a sea of white clouds." How gaily he had mounted then! He was going to meet Angelina Pietragnua, whom he had known in his youth, whom he had lately seen again, even more beautiful than he had imagined her during the years of separation, and who had at last given herself to him. But the Madonna del Monte had not been kind to the lovers. Although the brother of the parish priest had handed him the *benedetta chiave* (blessed key), the key of the door which gave access from his lodging to the peristyle of the church, he had failed to encounter the fair Milanese. Either to fan the flame of his love, or because her husband's jealousy had really been aroused, she managed to evade him. On the terrace whence I gaze on the lovely panorama, Beyle meditated on love, and waited vainly for her whom later he stigmatised as "a jade." A hundred years later almost to the day, I am conscious of the touching grace this memory adds to the landscape, this landscape which he looked at with unseeing eyes.

## CHAPTER VI

### COMO

How shall I be able to leave Lombardy and re-cross the Alps without stopping on the shore of Lario, where I have so often paced in idle meditation that I seem to have lived there for years? But this time, instead of staying at Bellagio or Cadenabbia I mean to remain at Como itself, and taste the charm of this town, which at the present day is rather the city of Volta than that of Pietro da Bregia, the architect of the Cathedral, but which still has artistic joys in store for the pilgrim.

I remember that, in company with Maurice Barrès, I once rallied Taine for having devoted more pages to Como Cathedral than to the shores of the Lake itself. And even now I am not prepared to go back upon what I said altogether, for Taine's chapter still amuses me. The writer exults when he quits Milan and its museums: "After three months spent among pictures and statues, I feel like a man who has been dining out every night for three months; give me bread and not pine-apple. The traveller gets into the train light of heart, knowing that when he arrives he will find real water, trees, and mountains, that the landscape will be more than three feet long and will not be enclosed in four gold bands." Then, on the following days, after having gone round the lake without leaving his boat, he devotes a short page to the marvels he has beheld, marvels he seemed to have longed for so fervently; and unable to resist the temptation of going to visit the Cathedral, he writes a whole chapter in which he discourses at length on the happy mingling of Italian and Gothic in the works of the Renaissance.

Now that I have been able to examine the cathedral at leisure, I can understand Taine's enthusiasm. Even at the close of a journey in Italy, it is able to detain and delight the traveller in quest of beauty. The façade (parallel with the charming Broletto of tri-coloured marble, a third of which had to be lopped off to allow space for the Cathedral front) is highly original with its three divisions marked by vertical lines of superposed statues. The middle stage is more especially elaborate and decorative. The central porch, surmounted by five lofty figures and a rose window encircled by niches, is flanked right and left by graceful, slender windows beneath which are the famous seated statues of the two Plinys. I notice that there is a great wealth of statues throughout; even the window-frames are adorned with them; there are perhaps a hundred on this façade, which by reason of its wide, flat spaces, looks almost bare at a first glance. The details of the architecture are now Gothic, now Renaissance; there could hardly be a better demonstration in marble of the struggle between the tendencies which divided the fifteenth century. These transition works have, moreover, a vigour and simplicity which reveal a robust and youthful art. No doubt, as Taine remarks, a certain artlessness, an over-literal imitation of forms, indicate a spirit which has not yet attained its full freedom of flight; exaggerated attitudes, superabundant locks, betray the excesses and irregularities of inventive genius; but this desire to render and express life has in its very clumsiness more charm than much cold and learned perfection. Moreover, as I have already pointed out more than once, Lombard sculpture is above all ornamental, and its object is to contribute to the general effect; Lombard artists are decorators rather than sculptors. This is still more evident in



the two lateral doors of the cathedral. The south porch is ascribed to Bramante, and although the attribution has been contested, it seems to me to bear the mark of his hand : the breadth of the design, the sobriety of the details, the firmness of the lines, the nobility of the effect are at least worthy of that great artist. The other door, generally known as the Porta della Rana, because of a frog carved on one of the pillars, is by the brothers Rodari. We divine that the two Lombard artists aspired to improve upon their model ; they succeeded only in making their work richer and more elaborate, too rich and too elaborate. Why those figures and that niche in its turn surmounted by statues, on the entablature ? Why those huge carved columns loaded with ornaments like the supports of an altar ? I recognise here the minds and hands of the artisans who worked on the Cathedral of Milan and the Certosa of Pavia.

But let us not imitate Taine ; let us give these last hours to the lake. At the end of last March, returning from Toledo and the harsh plateaux of Castille, I experienced such physical delight in arriving on these shores that they had never seemed so fair to me before. I declared that their seduction was more enthralling at that early season than in the autumn. This is only true from a certain point of view : the joy of the eye is more perfect in the spring. Through the atmosphere, not as yet tarnished by the dust of summer, the slightest details of the soil appear. The hills, which enclose the shores so harmoniously without imprisoning them, take on more delicate tints ; their slender curves and supple undulations become more definite ; the leafless trees do not mask them under the uniform tone of their foliage. The snow which still crowns the mountaintops, relieves their crests against the blue, and at the

same time forms a most vivid contrast to the trees and flowers.

But the deep poetry of this lake, and its unrivalled fascination, are only fully revealed in autumn when the languors and perfumes of the dying summer float about us in a perpetual incense. In the balmy alleys of its gardens one recalls those groves of Tasso, where, under the soft persuasion of flower scents, a hero's hate gave way to love. If other lakes are too chill and too unsympathetic, this one is perhaps too submissive to our desires and too indulgent to our sensuality. True lovers sometimes suffer here from so much unnecessary complicity, and so much joy that owes nothing to their own ardour.

I decided to return on foot to Cernobbio to revisit the Villa d'Este, and go over the ground I had travelled the first time I came to Como. What changes twelve years have wrought! Innumerable houses have risen along the road, which at present seems like the street of a single town extending right along the bank. Progress is always hostile to Nature, and the foe of the picturesque. Very soon there will be no walks unenclosed by walls. And as the high road will be more and more encumbered by tramways and motor-cars, we shall have to give up this once delicious walk. Ah! happy was the time when these corners were so tranquil, when one met only peaceful pilgrims and fine carriages, when, even on the outskirts of private properties, trees and flowers leant so amiably from terraces and through gateways that one seemed to be wandering through a park. How shamefaced and wretched the roadside verdure looks now under its shroud of dust! Alas! too lovely shores! your beauty will perish of its own glory like that laurel of the Borro-mean islands on which, tradition tells us, Bonaparte

carved the word *Victory* on the eve of Marengo, and which has succumbed to the mutilations inflicted by over-zealous admirers.

To find peace, one must take refuge on the eastern side, towards Torno, where the carriage road ends, and take the mule track which leads to Pliny's villa. Here there is solitude, as in the days of Pliny. The historian owned at least three country-houses on the shores of the lake. Those he called respectively *Tragædia* and *Comædia* because of their situation, one on the height, the other close to the water, "one standing on cothurni, the other on humble clogs," must have been in the neighbourhood of Lenno, where the shafts of columns and half-buried capitals bear witness to the former existence of sumptuous buildings. The third stood on the site of the present Villa Pliniana, beside the changeful spring which puzzled him so much, as we learn from his letter to Licinias Sura, where he enumerates all the contemporary explanations of the natural phenomenon. The spot is one of the wildest in these generally smiling regions; and we can imagine how this mysterious, almost menacing setting increased the terror and astonishment of the ancients. The lake alone smiles between the black trunks of the cypresses and quivers gently in the brightness of the dazzling mid-day sun, as Carducci described it:

Palpito il lago Virgilio, come velo di sposa  
Che s' apre al bacio del promesso amore.<sup>1</sup>

From this solitary corner, so near Como and yet so deserted, to which the echoes of the all too noisy shores do not penetrate, I see a little of Virgil and Pliny's lake gleaming under the glowing light in the languor

<sup>1</sup> Virgil's lake quivers, like the veil of a bride,  
Which opens to the kiss of promised love.



of autumn, just as all Lario gleamed two thousand years ago, under a more youthful sun, in a wilder setting.

## CHAPTER VII

### ISEO

JUST as the spell of Venice causes us to neglect the cities on the way from Milan to the Adriatic, so the magic of the great Italian lakes makes us overlook the delicious Lake of Iseo, which is a kind of tiny summary of all the rest. It has corners of vegetation as luxuriant as that of the Lakes of Como or Garda, scenery wilder than that of Lugano, and, like Maggiore, an imposing background of mountains with the snowy peaks of the Adamello, the Pian di Nive, and the glaciers of Salarno. Small as it is, it even boasts an island, the largest lake island in Italy.

On leaving Vicenza, I determined to revisit this lake, where something of the French spirit still lingers. On its shores, indeed, "the neighbourhood of which," as she says, "is fresh and gentle as one of Virgil's Eclogues," George Sand wandered with her turbulent dreams, and put a little, nay, perhaps a good deal of herself into the story of the unhappy loves of young Prince Karol of Roswald and the actress, Lucrezia Floriani.

In spite of the flowers and the garden walks all vocal with birds among the azaleas in spring-time, it is in September that I love best to visit these lakes, the very names of which make my heart beat faster on dull

days in Paris. Italian lakes and gardens! Why should these simple words move me more than any others? I have never, like some enthusiasts, vowed to take up my abode for ever on their perfumed terraces, at Bellagio or Pallanza; but it is delightful to spend a week among them, to know that they offer one a refuge, a haven of peace or of love.

Their magic is instantaneous. Scarcely has one seen them gleaming in the sun than one is conquered. They seem at once familiar, and this sudden impression given by a lake, a town, a country is never deceptive; it is nearly always definitive. Good or evil, it is rarely modified subsequently; at any rate, it is never completely effaced. As between persons who meet for the first time, sympathy, indifference or hostility is born of the mere encounter. We seem at once to come in contact with the soul of this lake, this town, this region, a soul compact of many things: of the air one breathes, the light which illumines it, the line of the shore or of the streets, the faces one encounters, the curve of the hills, and a thousand details visible and invisible.

The lakes of Savoy, of Bavaria and of Switzerland are too cold, too sublime, or too austere; they lack the nobility, the perfect proportion, and also the languor we find in combination here on this declivity of the Alps which looks down on the land of light and beauty. Taine, who extolled Lake Como, never really loved it. He stayed there but one day. Delighted to think he was not going to see any more pictures, but to bathe in nature, he embarked in the morning, went round the lake without landing anywhere, and returned to the town in the afternoon. The next day he devoted to the Cathedral, and to a long dissertation on architecture. Would it not have been better if he had stopped at Bellagio to taste the joy of life in the gardens of the

Villa Serbelloni? It is difficult to enjoy a landscape when one is chiefly concerned to get a few pages of copy out of it. Dumas the elder declared that he wrote the three worst articles he had ever produced on the shores of these lakes, in the loveliest country in the world. And I believe that George Sand came to Iseo rather to attune the tumult of her heart to the rhythmic murmur of the waters than to work.

Instead of embarking at once on the steamer for Lovere, I preferred to make my way for a mile or two on the new road which skirts the eastern shore as far as Pisogne. It is a wonderful piece of work, for the most part a terrace hewn in the rock, which rivals the Ponale road or the famous Axenstrasse of the Four Cantons.

Under the hot noon sunshine the water spreads out its harmonious surface like breadths of brilliant be-spangled silk. The vines run from tree to tree, laden with bunches of golden grapes which bring to my mind an excellent Predore wine with a fruity flavour. A few gardens extend languorously between the road and the lake. On the hillsides there are first olive-trees, then, throwing their dull gray into relief, evergreen oaks and chestnuts. In the background, high mountains stand out sharply against a sky so intensely blue that it has metallic reflections, and recalls the blue the Primitives painted behind the heads of their Madonnas. Beyond these again a fine white line indicates the crest of the glaciers.

But the water attracts me. I ask a fisherman to take me across the lake. Lulled by the monotonous movement of the oars, I see as in a dream the land and the white houses which glisten in the sun fading away in a golden dust. Here and there on the hills a village clings round a bell-tower, like swallows' nests on the



edge of a roof. The water glitters till we seem to be slipping across a frameless mirror. A warm breeze, heavy with the scents of dying summer, fans us. The air is so pure that I hear the sounds from the two shores distinctly, and when the siren of a steamer shrills through the air, I imagine I see the waves of sound rippling over my head.

It is an exquisite hour, and I seem suddenly to appreciate the essential charm of these lakes. It lies in the fact that the horizon is restricted, and that the eyes rest on actual definite things. All along the Mediterranean coasts, on the Riviera, at Naples, Palermo or Corfu, gardens as lovely lie in the languid air on the shores of water no less deeply blue. The joy of life may be felt before panoramas no less marvellous. The sea even augments their majesty; but from the very fact of its majesty, its infinitude, and above all, its mobility, its hold upon us is less direct, less physical, so to speak. It limits neither eye nor mind; it offers adventure too boundless; it is not, like the lake, within the limits of sight and desire. The sea is like a woman dancing at a distance in a shifting scene; the Italian lakes are beautiful maidens yielding to our embrace. We have but to hold out our hands to touch and clasp them. Like those October roses whose petals fall at a touch, they are ready to sink into our arms. They seem to offer themselves, like the nymph described by Politian in one of his *Stanze*, who advanced, laden with flowers, and whose "suave and gliding movement," *il dolce andar soave*, he praises in words I translate inadequately enough.

A less joyous vision recalls me to realities. The boat passes Tavernola, where I remember breakfasting one morning under a pergola of roses. The charming village is now but a heap of ruins, of gutted houses.

On March 3, 1906, a large portion of the place slipped and disappeared into the water. But why should we grieve? Does it not teach us once again that we must enjoy life in the few days left us?

And yet this thought of death, in the midst of the joyous splendour around me, returns insistently. I think of the stern phrase of Lucretius: *surgit amari aliquid*. And almost involuntarily, I made my way as soon as I landed to the gate of a little cemetery I had noticed from the boat. There was no one in sight, not even a custodian. Only a flock of sparrows, which flew off at my approach with shrill twitterings. Cypressess, those untiring sentinels, watched over the dead; their mourning spears rose in rigid lines along the box borders of the alleys. Between their black trunks stood the white marble of a few memorial monuments, or wooden crosses enclosed by railings; wistaria and Virginian creeper, reddened by the summer sun, clung to the iron which had already rusted. On some of the tombs, willows dropped the languid tears of their foliage.

How much better must it be to sleep here, than in those sumptuous modern cemeteries where the bad taste of the contemporary Italian is so horribly displayed. It would be dreadful to me to think that I should one day lie in the Campo Santo of Genoa or Milan, surrounded by men in stone frock-coats and women in flounced skirts, weeping and grimacing, handkerchief in hand, figures whose coarsely realistic attitudes recall the wax-works of the Musée Grévin. How much sweeter and softer is the shade of these willows!

Outside the burial ground, and on the bright terraces that rise above it, flowering shrubs, fig-trees loaded with fruit, and olive-trees of tarnished silver spread their verdant branches. An arbutus covered with red

berries gleams in the sun like a tree of coral. Vines cling to the poplars; the grapes have not yet been gathered; swarms of wasps and bees murmur round the over-ripe fruit. Life seems everywhere triumphant, yet between these walls, in the dim shade of the cypresses rising heavenward in an eternal prayer reigns a motionless peace, a cloistral silence. Only the long locks of a eucalyptus sway in the wind, showing flashes of silver. And this contrast causes me a strange agitation, more poignant than that I felt on the lake. I have never been able to enter a cemetery without emotion; and I have never felt more intensely the close relation between life and death than here, between these images of mortality and this exuberance of life. I seem like one of Orcagna's young nobles, one of those three "living ones," who, returning from hunting, after tasting the delight of life and the perfume of the woods, pass by festering corpses and breathe corruption and death. How touching was that idea of Barrès', who regretted that the burial-grounds of the little villages about the Italian lakes were not all situated close to the waters, receiving the caresses of the waves cast upon the shore by passing pleasure-boats. Such a vicinity would enhance the joy of lovers and give them that sense of exaltation felt by Venetian couples when they cross themselves as their gondolas glide past the red walls and the crosses of San Michele, or wander hand in hand under the sombre yews of the Franciscan island. Is it not natural, indeed, that enjoyment should be heightened when we remember that it is perishable, and that the coming second may snatch it from us? The lovers of the past who used to give their mistresses a *memento mori* were far-seeing. The delicately carved little skeleton turned their thoughts perpetually on death, and stimulated their



desires. I understand why Michelet took his betrothed to Père-Lachaise, and talked to her of love among the tombs. For Love finds pleasure in proximity to Death ; and often they walk hand in hand, the warm, rosy fingers of Love in the bony clasp of Death. I forget where I read that it was Don Juan of Manara who commissioned Valdês Leal to paint the horrible picture of the *Two Corpses* which is still in the Caridad of Seville, and in which a bishop and a noble are seen lying in their coffins, devoured by loathsome worms ; the lover of the thousand and one, we are told, sought to exasperate the ecstasy of regret by imaging his own beautiful face, which he had seen so often reflected in eyes brilliant with desire, thus disfigured and devoured. When Heinrich Heine tells us in his Memoirs of his love for the daughter of the Düsseldorf executioner, he recalls most vividly her long red tresses, which, when twisted round the young girl's neck, made her look like a decapitated person. But nowhere are Love and Death more inseparable than on Italian soil. I wish I had brought Leopardi's works with me ; I would have read the verses in which the poet of Recanati proclaims the mournful fraternity of Love and Death. In this burial ground enframed in the splendour of Lombard gardens, I should have appreciated the austerity of the elegy, the stern workmanship of which recalls the harsh landscapes of the Marches :

Fratelli, a un tempo stesso, Amore e Morte  
Ingenerò la sorte.<sup>1</sup>

Born at the same time, Love and Death are brothers ; this idea has always been a favourite theme of the Italian poets. In several passages of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante stimulates his passion by thinking of Beatrice

<sup>1</sup> Fate conceived Love and Death, the brothers, at the same moment.

in her shroud ; and on the ancient walls of the Campo Santo of Pisa, in the background of that *Triumph of Death* on which I have just been musing, there is a coppice near the old mail-clad virago, where in the golden shade of orange trees, careless lovers sport joyously as in one of the scenes of gallantry of the Decameron. Religion, too, is akin to Love ; in the adoration of the Virgin by men, and of Jesus by women, there is often a sensual ardour. Not that I doubt the purity and sincerity of most religious sentiment. But there are cases in which feminine devotion is but a perverted tenderness, addressed to the Son of Man in lieu of the lover. 'I think there can have been no more amorous creature than Saint Teresa, who even pitied Satan because he can never know the joys of love. But it is here in Italy that it is most difficult to define the limits of religion and sensuality ; and the Dominican nun, Saint Catherine, was even more amorous than the Spanish saint. The letters of the Sienese overflow with a passion in which the ecstasy is rather sensual than religious. In despite of the Church—nay, sometimes even under its auspices—for a Pope was not afraid to approve the burial in San Gregorio, among the sacred monuments, of the famous courtesan Imperia and the inscription on her tomb of her notorious calling—the old religion of Beauty and Pleasure revives in this land which so long nourished it, and mingles with Christian worship. I do not know if it be true, as is said, that certain procuresses of Venice and Naples are accustomed to show the young girls they have for sale in the churches, but I remember being accosted behind a pillar in St. Mark's.

While I meditate thus, a young woman of the people, bare-headed and dressed in black, enters the cemetery. Her wooden shoes, which, after the fashion of the

country, cover only the tips of her feet, clatter on the ground. She approaches and lays a bunch of flowers on a newly-dug grave marked by a simple cross. My presence embarrasses her. She kneels for a moment, murmurs a brief prayer and goes away, wiping a furtive tear from her eyes.

The vanilla-like scent of oleander mingles with the pungent smell of box and cypress. The wind brings the odour of the neighbouring gardens. Here, again, everything tells us that we must enjoy life for the brief span remaining to us.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BRESCIA

IF Vicenza is the city of Palladio, Brescia is that of Moretto. True, Brescia has many other interesting aspects. But in these Italian cities, so rich in marvels of every kind, the traveller must be moderate, and among the many flowers of the parterre, he must choose the loveliest and rarest.

Travellers seem to have shown little interest in the city before our own day. Stendhal, who saw it in 1801, tells us that it is "fairly attractive, of medium size, situated at the foot of a little mountain and sheltered from the north wind by its fortress on a mamelon of the mountain." This was all that struck the author of *La Peinture en Italie* in the birth-place of Moretto.



Taine did not halt between Verona and Milan ; he hardly deigned to cast a glance at Lake Garda from the railway carriage at Desenzano. Théophile Gautier certainly speaks of " Vicenza," but this was the name of a Venetian brunette of whom he made a pastel drawing ; as to Brescia, he passed through it at night, and stayed only an hour, to change horses ; he noted only the height of the houses and the delicious freshness of the water.

The situation of the town is delightful, at the foot of the Alps, the Brescian wall of which is pierced by the valleys of Camonica, Trompia and Sabbia. The Oglio, the Mella and the Chiese debouch from these and spread fertility over the plain. Few horizons are more varied and verdant than those which encircle the fortress. It is easy to understand the taste of the inhabitants for landscape and fine prospects, nor are we surprised to find so many of the inner courts of the houses decorated with frescoes which give an illusion of country scenes and woodland greenery.

Few cities have a more glorious past than

Brescia la forte, Brescia la ferrea,  
Brescia leonessa d'Italia  
beverata nel sangue nemico.<sup>1</sup>

These verses of Carducci's well express the martial character of the city, which still derives its wealth from the weapons it forges, and proclaims itself " the mother of heroes." The plain of the Mella still bears the name of the Valley of Iron and the towers, Torre della Pallata and the Torre del Popolo, evoke the memorable sieges undergone by Brescia on account of its strategic position, at the opening of the valleys which descend from the Tyrol. Scarcely a century passed when it was not

<sup>1</sup> Brescia the strong, Brescia the stern, Brescia the lioness of Italy, steeped in the blood of her enemies.

forced to defend itself. Gaston de Foix sacked it for a week. Bayard, who commanded his vanguard, showed his nobility of character there. We read in the *Loyal Serviteur* how he behaved to the two young girls of the house to which he was brought when wounded; to their terrified mother, who offered him a ransom, he said: "Madam, I know not whether I shall be healed of my wound; but as long as I live, no discourtesy shall be shown to you or to your daughters any more than to my own person." Away from France it is pleasant to recall the chivalrous traits of our countrymen. The Brescian women took part in the fighting, and have left a reputation of masculine courage. Brescians still cherish the memory of Brigitta Avogrado, who, at the head of a battalion of women, repulsed an assault of the enemy. The women of to-day no longer fight; but they seem to have retained their martial character, to judge by Alfieri's ironical verses:

Veggio Bresciane donne iniquo specchio  
farsi de' ben forbiti pugnaletti,  
Cui prova o amante infido o sposo veglio.<sup>1</sup>

This warlike past, which began with the conflicts of the old Brixia of the Celts and continues to Solferino, sets a halo of glory about the town which seems to be guarded by the beautiful *Victory* of the Temple of Hercules built by Vespasian. It is one of the most moving statues I know. All the great Italian poets have sung it. D'Annunzio devoted one of his proudest sonnets to it:

Bella nel peplo dorico, la parma  
poggiata contro la sinistra coscia,  
la gran Niké incide la sua parola.

<sup>1</sup> I see Brescian women making themselves evil mirrors of polished daggers, to be tested by faithless lover or aged husband.

"O Vergine, te sola amo, te sola!"  
 gridò l'anima mia nell' alta angoscia.  
 Ella rispose: "Chi mi vuole, s'arma!"<sup>1</sup>

But let us forget the bellicose city, and give an hour to the delightful Municipio, where we find Palladio's hand again in the frames of the windows, and to the Old Cathedral, so noble, so austere and so poignant that the very soul of the city seems still to be quivering in it. And let us devote ourselves to Moretto.

Alessandro Bonvicino, called Il Moretto: here is one of those painters whose name is familiar to all, but whose works are known to very few. When something has been said about his silvery grays, with the addition that he is one of the most fascinating painters of Northern Italy, the subject seems to be exhausted. True, it is difficult to form a complete idea of him without visiting Brescia. Nevertheless, some of his canvases still remain in Lombardy and Venetia. I noticed several in the Brera and at San Giorgio in Braida at Verona. Venice has examples in the Accademia and the Layard Collection; and also the *Christ at the House of Simon the Pharisee* which is at the Pietà, in the nuns' tribune; unfortunately, the church has been under repair for several years and the picture, one of the master's most important works, can no longer be seen. The two panels in the Louvre, representing *S. Bernardino of Siena* and *S. Louis of Toulouse*, are by no means adequate examples: yet when we examine them attentively we are fascinated by the calm, broadly treated faces, the quiet, noble attitudes, the sober and harmonious draperies which give a simplicity and

<sup>1</sup> Fair in her Doric peplum, her shield on her left hip, the great Niké cut short his words. "O Virgin, I love but thee, but thee!" cried my soul in its lofty anguish. She answered: "Let him who desires me arm himself."



unity to the general effect rare among the painters of the period.

At Brescia, on the other hand, it is easy to follow the artist step by step in his development. The town is full of his pictures. There are examples in every church, and one, San Clemente, is a museum of the works of the painter, who is buried there. As to the Martinengo Gallery, the principal room is almost entirely occupied by Moretto; it contains fourteen of his pictures; and this year the custodian showed me a fifteenth which had come from the Santa Zitta Institute.

The exhibition of Moretto's works, held at Brescia in 1898, did much to make his name known. The catalogue registered seventy works, coming almost exclusively from the town itself or its immediate neighbourhood. A great many had to be put aside for lack of space. For this reason the exquisite picture from the church of Paitone, *The Virgin appearing to a Deaf Mute*, was not included.

The silvery-gray tone noted by all art-critics is, indeed, one of the characteristics of the master, especially towards the close of his career. It is very noticeable when we can compare him with other painters, as for instance at the Venice Accademia or even at San Giorgio in Braida at Verona, which is a kind of museum of the Schools of north-eastern Italy; his beautiful *Saint Cecilia* is very individual in colour. But we must beware of exaggeration, and this silvery gray is to be found in Romanino, his master and rival, and in other painters of the district. This very year I noticed it in Girolamo da Treviso, in two pictures of the gallery which precedes the famous Malchiostro Chapel.

Moreover, Il Moretto has other qualities. After spending several hours in the Gallery, I tried to formu-

late a few general ideas as to his work. Two very marked characteristics presented themselves to my mind.

In the first place, the artist possessed in the highest degree the gift of harmony and gradation in his colour. His taste is sure and delicate. The tones are contrasted and balanced with the most cunning art. Grays, yellows and pale blues give freshness and brilliance to all his compositions. In certain canvases there is a little of that fusion which has sufficed to immortalise Correggio, and that vaporous gradation of tints which the Italians call *sfumato*. Everything is combined for the delight of the eye: the figures, the draperies, the ornaments, the accessories and also the landscapes in which he excels. One of the latest acquisitions of the Gallery is the fresco in the centre of the room, a *Christ bearing His Cross*, removed from the church of San Giuseppe, where it was deteriorating; here we may admire a panorama of mountains crowned with fortresses, which further enables us to appreciate his knowledge of perspective.

The other quality is the perfect equilibrium the master always achieves between the conception of the work and its material execution. When treating religious subjects, he gives his figures the dignity and nobility that befit them. A deeply spiritual life irradiates their faces. In his *Saint Anthony* of Padua, the simple, tranquil majesty of the saint who raises the lily with an ample gesture, the ardent veneration of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino as he contemplates the thaumaturgist, the benevolent serenity of Saint Anthony Abbot leaning on his crutch characterise an unforgettable trio. All his Virgins have a poignant gravity. They are far removed, indeed, from the complicated art of the Florentines, that *Madonna of Saint Barnabàs*, for

instance, under which Botticelli was impelled to write Dante's verse

Vergine madre, figlia del tuo Figlio.<sup>1</sup>

to explain the mysterious and enigmatical expression in the eyes of the Virgin; far too from the Virgins the tender Luini was painting at the same time, whose *carnosità*, or *tondezza*, as the Italians call it, is more akin to pagan beauty than to the Christian ideal. Moretto followed in the main the Venetian tradition, which is free from the literary, theological or philosophical pre-occupations of the painters of Rome and Florence. Like Titian or Palma, with whom he worked, Bonvicino is quite untouched by these more intellectual than pictorial influences. His *Salome* even is so calm and serious that we are surprised to learn that she is, as the inscription under the picture tells us, the fierce princess who "*caput saltando obtinuit*" (who obtained the head by dancing). This imperturbable serenity has been taken by some for sadness, and a certain writer tried to account for it by the impression made on the painter by the calamities that befell Brescia during his youth.

These qualities of Moretto's are recognisable in the rich series of pictures which adorns the walls of the Brescian churches. The masterpiece among them is the *Coronation of the Virgin*, in the Church of San Nazzaro e San Celso. But it is at San Clemente that we can enjoy the gentle genius of the master in all its purity. Here, together with his perishable body, is the very soul of Bonvicino. How radiant is his *Virgin surrounded by Saints* behind the high altar! Who that has once seen the warrior, Saint Florian, that gallant youth in the armour with golden reflections,

<sup>1</sup> Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son.



can ever forget him ? The canvas attracts the traveller directly he crosses the threshold of the little church, and draws him back to it with irresistible magic. The whole nave seems to be irradiated by it. There is no finer example of the artist's two gifts : colour and composition.

Moretto also painted a few portraits, one of which is in the Martinengo Gallery ; in this branch, however, he is eclipsed by the most gifted of his pupils, Giambattista Moroni. But Moroni, though related to the School of Brescia through his master, belongs more especially to Bergamo. And Brescia is so rich that it need not borrow from its neighbour.

Romanino, on the other hand, although he worked more outside his native city and travelled a great deal—even to Paris, where he worked in the Queen Mother's apartments in the Louvre—is thoroughly Brescian. Born thirteen years before his pupil and rival Bonvicino, he survived him some twelve years. His career was long and prolific. The province of Brescia is full of his works, and there is not a village church in the Val Camonica which does not boast its picture or fresco by Romanino. He is represented in most of the great Italian galleries, sometimes by masterpieces, as at Padua, where his Madonna is perhaps the finest picture in the museum. Many churches too are the proud possessors of his works, notably San Giorgio in Braida at Verona, and the Cathedral at Cremona, where there are admirable frescoes I should like to have seen again this year, to complete my impression of the master. Though they are not free from occasional negligences and heavinesses, we can admire unreservedly the nobility of the attitudes, and above all, the colour, in which the beautiful yellow he affected harmonises so finely with the gilded vault and pillars.

Beside them, Pordenone's famous works seem black and declamatory ; they look like pictures. Romanino, on the other hand, was a master of fresco. This may be seen even at Brescia, either in the Corpus Domini Chapel of San Giovanni Evangelista where he loses nothing by comparison with Moretto, or in the Museum, where are two frescoes, removed from the refectory of the Monastery of Rodengo ; save for the somewhat ungraceful attitude of the Magdalen (which we note again in a painting in the church of San Giovanni and in a Moretto at Santa Maria Calchera), the composition is powerful ; but it is mainly by the colour they triumph and produce the "extraordinary effect" spoken of by Burckhardt. Beside them, the artist's easel pictures pale somewhat, if we except the altar-piece in San Francesco, a masterly work he painted when he was still young, on his return from Venice. The influence of Titian is apparent here. The magnificent frame enhances the effect of this picture, in which beauty of form competes with splendour of colour.

Compared with these two masters, the other Brescian painters seem to me greatly inferior, and I am surprised to find that some critics rank Savoldo with them. He is a second-rate artist, interesting only by virtue of his landscape backgrounds and effects of light. Moreover, save for the accident of birth, he has little connection with Brescia, where he is barely represented. He never threw off the influence of Venice, where he worked for a long time ; he has no individuality. He is no more noteworthy than a large number of the pupils of Il Moretto and Romanino, who created an artistic centre important enough to enable an historian to say : "In the middle of the 16th century, Brescia was greatly superior to Florence."

It is strange and regrettable that these schools of

Northern Italy are so little known. The general ignorance of them is due to the fact that for a long time art criticism neglected Venetian painting and its collateral branches in favour of Florence and Rome. It sacrificed truly pictorial qualities to ideas and purity of line, following the example of Vasari, who speaks very summarily of the Northern painters, and dwells at length on the masters of Central Italy whom he had known personally or from immediate tradition. It was not until later, when colour was given the preponderance due to it in painting, that it was shown how Venice, together with Florence and Rome, and almost untouched by them, had become a capital of art, and at least their equal. Then, naturally, as there were few records and little information available concerning the less important neighbouring schools, these were affiliated to Venice, and all the North Italian painters were classified as the disciples of Titian, whose reign had surpassed all others in length and splendour. At present these impressions have been corrected, and the characteristics of each group have been brought out. The first to be re-constituted was the School of Padua, which, though materially nearer than any other to Venice, submitted less than any other to Venetian influence; its scientific curiosity, its interest in expression, its precision, verging at times on dryness, have nothing in common with the voluptuous charm of the Venetians. Of the remaining Northern centres, Verona, Treviso, Vicenza, Brescia and Bergamo, Brescia was undoubtedly the most important and the most original. Il Moretto was one of the greatest painters of Northern Italy.



## CHAPTER IX

## BERGAMO

"PASSING over the plains of Lombardy Oswald exclaimed: 'Ah! how beautiful it was when all the elms were covered with leaves and the vines hung in festoons between them.' Lucile said to herself: 'Yes, it was beautiful when Corinne was with him!'" True indeed! It is ourselves we project on the landscape. But the road from Milan to Bergamo on a bright September morning is in fact delicious. "Magnificent," says Stendhal in his *Journal*, and he pronounces the region the loveliest spot on earth and the most exquisite he had ever seen. True, he also beheld it with the eyes of a youth of eighteen, and I am well aware that when he is moved by the glories of Nature, when a panorama, to quote his own words, "played as with a bow upon his soul," it was himself he put into things. Remember that curious phrase of his: "The line of the rocks as we approached Arbois seemed to me a lively image of Mathilde's soul." But Lombardy was always the land he loved, and we must admit that he, who wished for no title on his tomb but the word *Milanese*, remained faithful in his love and admiration.

Walking along this road in the morning sunshine we realise the delight Leonardo must have felt when, leaving behind him his sweet but somewhat austere Tuscany, he viewed this plain where everything breathes joy and pleasure. How lovingly he must have studied its youths and maidens with their long, large eyes, deep and enigmatic under the shade of their warm eyelids.

Ah! the grace of those Italian mornings on roads

bordered by fields and meadows ! The air is pure and light. The vines run from tree to tree, from one *pioppo* to the other, like festival garlands. It is not surprising that they should always have enchanted Northerners, accustomed to the vineyards of France or the Rhineland, with their stunted, surly stocks. Goethe declared that they had taught him the meaning of the word "festoon." As to President de Brosses, he describes them with all the tenderness of a Burgundian who confesses himself less sensitive to the beauty of cities than to the spectacle of Nature. He lauds the richness of these vines "all mounted upon trees, over the branches of which they clamber, and whence, as they fall, they encounter other sprays to which the vinedressers fasten them, till they form from tree to tree festoons laden with fruit and foliage. No opera scenery could be more picturesque or decorative than such a landscape. Each tree, covered with vine-leaves, forms a dome, whence hang four festoons which are fastened to its neighbour trees."

But Bergamo now appears at a turn in the road. The old city rises in the golden light with the girdle of ramparts recalling its warlike past, the days of the Lombard League and the struggles against Milan. In 1428 Filippo Maria Visconti ceded it to Venice, which kept it in subjection till 1797, save for a few years when it belonged to Louis XII, after the Battle of Agnadel. For nearly four centuries it enjoyed peace and prosperity. It seems strange that though so near to Milan, it should have remained so long in the possession of Venice. But we can understand the pride of Francesco Foscari, when from the summit of the Campanile, gazing across the lagoon and the islands, he contemplated with all the joy of possession the immense plain where he divined the presence of Treviso,

Padua, Vicenza and Verona, already subject to the Most Serene Republic, and the new possessions with which he had just endowed her, Bergamo and Brescia. How moving was the fate of this Doge, who, after exhausting all the intoxication of glory and popularity, tasted every bitterness, had to condemn and exile his own son, to abdicate, and finally died of a sudden congestion, as he heard the bells summoning Venice to the marriage of his successor with the sea!

The new town lies in the plain between the Brembo and the Serio, affluents of the Adda. It is of no particular interest. The ancient Fair of Sant' Alessandro, where for centuries the finest Italian cloth was sold, lasts a month, from mid-August to mid-September, but it has lost its ancient prestige. The *fiera* is over, and the traders are taking down their stalls. It is amusing enough to watch the life of these exuberant Bergamese, whom Bandello rallies in his *Novelli*. They are somewhat coarse and vulgar, like their Bergamasque dance and the music of their Donizetti. Perhaps the thought is suggested by the fact that I am in the land of Harlequin, but the people seem to me to be always acting. All these traders and peasants have most mobile, varied faces; with their grimacing mouths, their laughing eyes, their restless arms, they put an exaggeration into the expression of their sentiments which, though sincere, seems more akin to the theatre than to actual life.

I am eager to revisit ancient Bergamo: instead of following the road which winds along the hillside and creeps up to the ramparts as if seeking to enter by surprise, I take a too modern but convenient funicular, which brings me to the heart of the city. Here the streets are calm and empty. There is nothing to distract one from contemplation of the past. To the



dreamer no towns are so precious as those which are so nearly dead that they are like beautiful tombs. He is not obliged, as in Rome and Florence, to make a constant leap from past to present. The silence of the deserted ways, the peaceful serenity of the buildings, the majestic air of solitude in palaces and houses all carry back the mind to one period and no alien pre-occupation intrudes. The central square, small but dramatic, where the heart of the community beat for centuries, is even more evocative. All the civil and religious buildings necessary for public life are gathered together in a dignified group. Silence reigns here. The grass is growing in places between the uneven stones of the pavement, recalling the verses d'Annunzio dedicated to Bergamo in his *Città del Silenzio* :

Davanti la gran porta australe i sassi  
deserti verzicavano d'erbetta  
quasi a pascere i due vecchi leoni.<sup>1</sup>

We will stop at the Colleoni Chapel. It is the masterpiece of Amadeo of Pavia, and one of the finest achievements of Lombard sculpture, which indeed, can boast only skilful artisans without much individuality, who worked mainly at collective tasks, such as the exuberant decoration of Milan Cathedral and the Certosa of Pavia. Amadeo played an important part in these works, which he directed for several years; but he left some more notable productions, such as the bas-reliefs on the two pulpits in Cremona Cathedral and the sepulchral monuments of Santa Maria delle Grazie at Milan, the authorship of which has lately been restored to him on sufficient evidence. The

<sup>1</sup> Before the great south gate the deserted stones are green with grass, almost enough to serve as food for the two old lions.

Colleoni Chapel establishes his rank as the best Lombard sculptor of the Renaissance.

The façade is rather a great decoration than an architectural work, and there can be no doubt that the mouldings of the plinth, the gallery under the dome and the sculptures are by the hand of Amadeo; we need but recall the details of the façade of the Certosa of Pavia. Here we see the same graceful, rich and varied art, rather overloaded and highly coloured. I will not say with Burckhardt somewhat childish. The red, white and green marbles form an iridescent and on the whole, agreeable harmony.

The interior has unfortunately been restored, and Tiepolo's three frescoes are out of keeping with their surroundings; they complete the destruction of any religious and sepulchral character in the chapel. In addition to the two monuments it contains, Amadeo carved the delightful little fountain in the sacristy and the pillars at the entrance to the choir, which he decorated with vine-garlands and children treading out the grapes. The tomb of Medea, Colleoni's daughter, was originally at Basella, in a cloister of the Dominican church; it was only brought to this chapel in the course of last century. It is entirely of Carrara marble, and is a work of accomplished elegance, of simple and airy grace. The coffin is ornamented with three bas-reliefs, two of which are merely the arms of the city of Bergamo and of the Colleoni family respectively, surrounded by elegant wreaths of flowers and foliage. Above the sarcophagus are three small statuettes, the Virgin between Saint Magdalen and Saint Catherine. But I admire above all the recumbent statue of the dead woman, dressed in a richly embroidered robe. It is a life-size portrait, delicate and natural.

Colleoni, greatly pleased with Amadeo's work, thought

of his own glory and ordered a tomb for himself. But as a simple sarcophagus in the chapel of some church did not seem to him adequate, he farther commissioned the artist to erect a special building for its reception.

The Condottiere's tomb, richer and more imposing than that of his daughter, occupies the entire background of the chapel, for Amadeo relegated the altar to a little lateral rotunda adjoining the main building. The monument consists of two superposed rows of bas-reliefs surmounted by an equestrian statue in gilded wood by a German master. The general effect is inharmonious and somewhat theatrical. The lower bas-reliefs are by far the best and most important; they are carved in a single block of marble resting on four columns supported by lions; they represent scenes of the Passion: a Flagellation which is a veritable miniature, a very animated *Bearing of the Cross*, a *Crucifixion* in which I noted the beautiful attitude of the swooning Virgin, a dramatic *Entombment*, and a *Resurrection* inferior to the rest, ill-composed and nerveless. These bas-reliefs, fascinating as they are, cannot be said, on close examination, to rise above fine studio-work. There is no evidence of passion in the artist, no inner life in the whole. The art is delicate and elaborate, but superficial; the intense and exaggerated expression is somewhat shallow and artificial. Amadeo's art may be said to be an epitome of Lombard sculpture, which is rarely more than rich and pleasing decoration.

This chapel seems to me a somewhat insipid sanctuary for the slumber of that Bartolomeo Colleoni whose stern, tall figure on the Campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo of Venice haunts me in the midst of all this grace and puerility. But maybe it was Verrocchio who exaggerated, and his statue was rather a symbol of all those Con-



dottieri of whom Colleoni was the last, than a realistic portrait. The great race of adventurers came to an end with Colleoni, and he died without having been able or perhaps willing to create a principality for himself. To the Venetian senators who came to greet him on his death-bed he said : " Never give to any other General the power you entrusted to me ; I might have turned it to worse account than I have done." He seems to have had no ambition but to amass a fortune and enjoy it, no care for anything but his glory and the name he was to leave behind him. He died before the chapel in which he wished to rest was completed. During his last days he often came himself to superintend the work ; then he would go and, from the ramparts which peace had already made useless, contemplate the plain where he had fought alternately for Venice and Milan.

To-day there is nothing martial about the fortifications ; but they give the town an air of majesty which it preserves with pride, like those fallen princes who jealously guard the paraphernalia of past splendour. They have been transformed into a magnificent promenade, shaded by fine trees, and so deserted that as soon as evening falls, Harlequin can keep his trysts without fear of interruption. A walk round Bergamo on a clear September morning on these ramparts is an exquisite experience. The views are infinitely varied. The landscape changes like some gigantic scene on the stage. To the north there is a panorama of mountains where the picturesque chain of the Bergamasque Alps stretches out, dominated by the peak of the Tre Signori. The valleys of Brembano, Imagna and Seriana open their deep, irregular gorges, clothed with pastures and forests. To the south, the wonderful plain of the Adda extends as far as the eye can reach, green and

smooth as a vast pacific sea. Fields of maize and cereals, meadows, rice-grounds, mulberries and fruit trees cover it with a luxuriance unknown in any other part of Europe. I can think of no landscape which gives such an impression of wealth, abundance and fertility. The immemorial lists of nations, we can understand the greed they evoked in all the conquerors who beheld them, from the hordes of Alaric to the soldiers of Barbarossa and Napoleon. Each crop here yields a double harvest, and hay is cut several times in one season. The Alps work this recurrent miracle with their melting snows and overflowing lakes. The fat soil is nourished by constant moisture. At this season especially, after a rainy day, one repeats instinctively the verse of the *Georgics*: *Plenis rura natant fossis*, for truly the meadows swim, the ditches overflow. It was in the kindred plain of the Mincio, like the Adda a tributary of the Po, that the elegiac soul of the Mantuan awoke. Never have I felt closer to him. The same atmosphere bathes me, that atmosphere of joy and plenty. At the foot of the ramparts, on the sunny terraces, peasant women are gathering the grapes in large baskets, singing and chattering gaily, just as, two thousand years ago, the women must have made their vintage on the land of Æneas.

## CHAPTER X

## THE TERRACES OF BELLAGIO

I COULD not tear myself away from the garden of Lombardy without pausing at least for a few hours at Bellagio. I longed to see the sun set on those flowery shores from the terraces of the Villa Serbelloni, which, rounding the magic promontory, command the three arms of the lake in turn. The paths are bordered with roses, camellias and magnolias, pomegranate-trees with gnarled, twisted trunks like huge cables, orange and lemon-trees, the glaucous spears of the cactus, and huge aloes with massive fleshy leaves. The oleanders bend beneath the weight of their poisonous bouquets. On this afternoon of dying summer, odours more intoxicating than the must of vine-vats rise from the hot earth and the banks of flowers, disturbing emanations such as one breathes at Florence in the spring-time in the overcharged atmosphere of the Mercato Nuovo. It is as if one were standing in the middle of a hot-house where the pollen hangs heavily in the warm air, or plunged in a liquid pool of perfume. And above all these odours, the *Olea fragrans* sheds its powerful aroma. No flowering tree distils a scent more subtle, penetrating and exquisitely voluptuous than this olive of the far East, which has been acclimatised on the shores of the Italian Lakes, where it flowers in September. A single shrub perfumes a whole garden; an invisible incense seems to enwrap him who approaches it; as twilight darkens, the scent makes one almost dizzy.

At every step exquisite glimpses of the banks of the lake are seen through the bosky verdure that borders the walks; Bellagio is like a diamond set among the



sapphires of the three encircling lakes, and the little towns lie crouched at the water's edge, like sleepy beasts in the dazzling sunset. I see pink and white villages, gay holiday houses in the midst of gardens and shady trees.

Before me, bumble-bees shake out their wings and then drop heavily to the ground. Little gray lizards flee at my approach, slip into a hole in the wall, and peep at me with their shining eyes. Pigeons run about on the gravel, rolling along heavily as if they had not the strength to rise; they remind me of the Borromean doves described by Barrès, which, intoxicated by the accumulated scents of the terraces of Isola Bella, rose so lazily that he might have caught them in his hand. The *brevia*, the south wind which blows upon the lake after the mid-day calm, is still so warm that as it touches one's face, it feels like the brushing of moist lips. On each side of the path the flowers droop in voluptuous languor. At the ends of their long stalks, cannas open their hearts to the caresses of the breeze. Hot tears of resin flow from the burning bark of the pines. Cantharides spread their green wings motionless on the leaves. A golden mist hovers over the sharp summits of the cypresses, which seem to vibrate in the metallic atmosphere. The trees are wreathed with Virginian creeper, blood-red amongst the green; others, clothed in ivy intermingled with climbing roses, recall Mantegna's flowery porticoes.

On the topmost terrace, crowning the promontory, whence the northern shores of the lake are seen as from the prow of a tall ship, a vast calm reigns. The graceful silhouettes of parasol pines stand out against the sky, and make a delicate framework for the luminous landscape. Below them the gardens lie blurred by a bluish dust. The bare trunks of the olives look black

against the horizon ; but the shade of their foliage quivers with the old Virgilian softness ; when the wind lifts it, waves of silver run among the moving branches. It is the hour when the setting sun seems to linger lovingly before it disappears, as if anxious to immobilise for a moment the rich scene it illumines. The vast expanse of water reflects, as in a mirror, the golden and coppery tones that dying day casts on everything. The rippling water is like an expanse of shot silk ; where the sun catches it, it gleams like a damascened shield covered with brilliant scales. On the gilded shores the little towns are encircled by luminous haloes. Close at hand Varenna at the opening of the Val d'Esino extends in the verdure of its gardens. The Fiume Latte has been dried up by the heat ; but we can still perceive the track of the torrent which in spring-time descends in a cascade white and foaming as a stream of milk. By the water, on the railway cut in the solid rock beside the Stelvio road which forms a winding ledge, a train hastens towards Colico ; seen from here, it looks like a child's toy ; it plunges into the various tunnels, some of them so short that the engine emerges at one end before the last carriages have entered at the other. Towards the north, certain thin light lines suggest the distant villages, huddled upon the banks like flocks of gulls : Rezzonico and its old castle, Gravedona, Dervio at the foot of the pointed Legnone. A white boat steers slowly towards Menaggio, leaving behind it a triple furrow which widens gradually.

But night is beginning to fall, and I must go down. As day dies, the scent of the flowers becomes more intense. Never does Nature speak more insistently to the senses than in the summer twilight. The charm of the morning, like the love of a young girl, is woven of airy tenderness and purity ; the splendour of the

afternoons is full of voluptuous languor. The dawn is frank and joyous ; the sunsets are ardent and dreamy. The clusters of ivy, the flowery garlands that hang from trees and walls seem to me as indolent and lascivious as the arms of sleeping Bacchantes. In my growing exaltation, I imagine that I am walking in the enchanted gardens of Armida ; the couples I meet become the heroes of Tasso, forgetful of the world in their amorous frenzy. For these gardens, like all the others reflected in this lake, are not inert ; so many desires bore their fevers about here, so many vices lurked, so many guilty or terrible passions wandered under their complaisant shade that they are as it were saturated with voluptuous ferments. Beautiful love stories, intoxicating or disturbing, always stir the dark depths of our sensuality. Jean Jacques Rousseau was well advised when he gave up the idea of making the shores of these lakes the scene of his *Nouvelle Héloïse* ; Julie's heroic struggle against unlawful love would have been too unequal. Nature, and more especially this Italian Nature still under the domination of the great god Pan, is the most dangerous counsellor, the most redoubtable auxiliary, the most insidious accomplice of lovers. She teaches submission to brute forces. Only such purity as that of the Poverello and his companions of the Portiuncula could have failed to find Satan lurking in the leafy alleys of the woods.

Under the great oak which shades the terrace near the villa I lean on the marble balustrade the red veins of which seem to swell with warm blood. Between the branches of the tree and through the slight veil of motionless leaves which interpose like the foreground of a stage scene, I see the two creeks of the lake quivering in the light amidst a double curve of green



hills. The water is like molten gold, full of yellow and russet reflections. Though the sun has disappeared, it still works this miracle by illumining a few light clouds which hover over Generoso in the distance. These fiery clouds shed amber lights upon the lake; the parts of the sky which are clear tinge the waters with paler reflections. What a symphony in gold! Any painter who should put it on canvas would be accounted extravagant; in nature as in life, truth is often stranger than fiction. Between the arms of Como and Lecco, the Brianza spreads out its meadows, its vineyards, its mulberries and olives, a veritable hanging garden emerging from a bath of gold. Red roofed houses are scattered over it. I can see the famous gardens with musical names: Melzi, Poldi, the park of the Villa Giulia and its camellia groves, slumbering motionless in the languid air. Looking down on plateau and banks, softly rounded hills rise in graceful curves and leap one above the other like waves suddenly congealed.

There are few more fascinating panoramas. True, Florence as seen from Fiesole or San Miniato, and the gentle Umbrian valley viewed from the Giardino di Fronte at Perugia, excite a deeper emotion; but certainly there is no more voluptuous vision than this. Indeed, it is almost too beautiful. The excitement it produces is too violent, too physical, as I said of Lake Iseo. Our senses are taken captive by the languor that breathes from everything, and more especially from the water which lends a kind of feminine grace to the landscape. These shores have the warm sensuality of Lombard girls. The gaily coloured villas, festooned with garlands like dancing saloons, the painted roofs, the bedizened façades smile like courtesans on the wayfarer. Carducci's verses are more applicable to Bellagio than to Salò:

Lieta come fanciulla che in danza entrando abbandona  
 le chiome e il velo a l'aure  
 e ride e gitta fiori con le man' piene, e di fiori  
 le esulta il capo giovine.<sup>1</sup>

But alas! the shores of Virgil's Lario have been more ruthlessly invaded by the cosmopolitan crowd than even Venice, Naples or Palermo. How Beyle would suffer could he return to the shade of the plane-trees of Cadenabbia, under the lovely Casa Sommariva, now Germanised and re-christened! Yet man has not been able to disfigure the scene completely. So much natural beauty cannot be destroyed in a few centuries. From this spot Stendhal might read his fine description at the beginning of the *Chartreuse de Parme* without having to change much. He would recognise the enchanting sites of Tremozzo and Grianta, the Villa Melzi, the sacred woods of the *Sfondrata*, and "the bold promontory which separates the two arms of the lake, the voluptuous side towards Como, the austere branch towards Lecco, sublime and graceful prospect which the most famous view in the world, that of the Bay of Naples, equals, but cannot surpass." Perhaps he might still find everything here "tender, noble and eloquent of love;" but he could hardly add as he did that "here nothing recalls the ugliness of civilisation."

Night has fallen gently and gradually. Things are wrapped in silky veils. An invisible mist has risen from the waters, has blurred the sharp outlines, and draped the shores in supple velvet. The hills seem to have drawn themselves together round the lake. Long vaporous scarves float over the tree-tops. The moonless

<sup>1</sup> Joyous as a maiden who, entering the dance, tosses hair and veil to the winds, and laughs and throws flowers with lavish hands, and with flowers delights her youthful head.

heavens are spangled with stars which the moisture in the air causes to seem less distant and more brilliant. The Pleiades, still breathless from the pursuit of Orion, twinkle hurriedly, like palpitating hearts. The Milky Way is all aglow. This evening the stars do not suggest the golden nails of the ancients, but rather globes of fire suspended in the darkness and ready to fall, drawn down by the perfumes of the earth and the languor of the waters. But very soon they pale. The moon rises on the horizon, over Lecco where the mountains dip. It seems to be emerging from the lake. In the mist which veils all contours the ancient heathen divinity, the confidant of lovers and astrologers, is a fiery boat burning in the night. Under its slanting rays the Lecco arm shines like a silver mirror.

It is a very hot evening. I hear the muffled panting of a big steamer making its way to Menaggio in a blaze of electric light. Then silence, peaceful and complete; save for the blundering flight of an occasional bat, and the tireless lapping of waves against the banks. Gradually I yield to the solemn emotion which all impressionable souls feel before the serenity of Nature on a still night. Life seems to pause and sleep in such nocturnal hours, like Michelangelo's recumbent woman, and until dawn only man and the world will continue to grow old. From the silvery skies a bluish dust falls on the scented gardens whose incense still flows out in heavy waves. The sail of a skiff gleams in the moonbeams, a great white swan afloat on the quiet waters. Only a light or two still twinkle in the distance like little winking eyes. Bellagio is falling asleep amidst the perfumes.



PART II

EMILIA



## CHAPTER I

### PIACENZA

BEFORE continuing my journey to Umbria, I will take advantage of this fresh, moist season of early autumn to revisit Emilia and follow the Via Emilia from end to end. I trust a benignant sky will spare me the fatigue of those dusty torrid days, when the traveller finds it impossible to slake his thirst, in spite of the innumerable drinks he swallows in all the *osterie*. Frequent rains have left the landscape almost green and he may tread the road of two thousand years without being blinded by clouds of dust. Sometimes he will even notice a trickle of water in those famous torrents of the Apennines which are generally dried up for six months of the year, and whose beds, often wider than those of our largest rivers, cannot even serve to dry linen, according to the time-honoured jest, since no pool of water in which to wet it is available.

There is no happier illustration of the intelligence of the Romans than the conception of the Via Emilia. They perceived very clearly that the straight line would not, in this case, be the shortest way to unite their capital to the towns of Upper Italy and to trans-Alpine countries. By skirting the Apennines, they evaded both the difficulty of constructing a wide carriage-road through a wall of mountains, and the dangers of permanent contact with warlike populations who



would have found it easy to guard the passes and bar access to them. They also saw that the favourable point for an invasion of the Gauls, who had already poured into the valley of the Po, was towards the Adriatic, where the narrow plain between sea and mountain forms a natural corridor. Thus, after having completed the Via Flaminia, they marked out the new road which, running in a straight line from Rimini to Piacenza, makes a magnificent strategic bulwark. The skill of the Consul Marcus Æmilius Lepidus who carried out this plan in the year of Rome 567 was so perfect that after twenty-one centuries, the Via Emilia is still the principal route of communication for the region, and that no modification of the course would be necessary, were the road to be constructed anew to-day. He overcame all the difficulties that presented themselves by making it pass neither too near the Apennines, which would have exposed it to the rigours of a very severe winter climate, and necessitated artificial protection, nor through the lower part of the plain, where the numerous marshes of those days were dangerous to health.

It was at Piacenza that the Via Emilia ended, and it was thence the three great roads leading from Italy into Gaul started : one by Genoa and La Turbie, the other by Susa, Briançon and Die, the third by Aosta and the Little Saint Bernard. The choice of Piacenza as the outpost fortress to ensure the free passage of the legions across the Po also indicates a high degree of practical sense. The town is still, by virtue of its position, an important citadel ; if an invasion were threatened from the north-east, the decisive encounter would probably take place at Piacenza, which commands the river between Cremona and the passes of Stradella,

Founded very early as a military colony, the city flourished throughout the Roman period and in the Middle Ages, when it was one of the most active members of the Lombard League. Its decline dates from the time of the Farnese, who are disagreeably recalled to the visitor by the inelegant remains of a heavy castle, and the two equestrian statues of Alessandro and Ranuccio which Stendhal stigmatised as "more absurd than the statues in Paris." It is undeniable that the charming Piazza dei Cavalli is disfigured by Francesco Mocchi's two monuments, the works of a forerunner of Bernini, whom he equalled in theatrical exaggeration and surpassed in bad taste. It is to be feared that the Piacenzans, who appear indeed to be proud of him, will never banish him from the fine façade of their communal palace.

This building of white marble and rosy brick is a masterpiece, and I know few structures of the Gothic period at once more majestic and seductive. The lower storey consists of a marble portico of five great pointed arches open to the street, where the citizens walk to and fro to-day as they did five centuries ago, passionately discussing questions of local politics with musical expressive intonations. On this plinth of sun-kissed marble rests the upper part of the building, a single storey in red brick, crowned by a cornice of indented battlements. Six round-headed arches enframe the very graceful windows, richly pierced and decorated with slender columns; no two windows are alike. On the lateral walls the windows are still more fanciful; on one side they are surmounted by a rose-window, on the other by an elegant square dormer. This palace is perhaps the earliest and certainly one of the richest of those municipal buildings which bear witness to the prosperity of the towns of Upper Italy

in the Middle Ages, and attest their independence. In the plain of the Po, where the air was freer and livelier than elsewhere, Gothic civil architecture developed untrammelled. The cities, numerous and powerful, rivalled each other in the splendour of their communal buildings. Piacenza, proud of its Roman past, was bent on being one of the first in the contest.

Leaving the Municipio, I feel disinclined to revisit the other sights of the town. The Cathedral is certainly a fine Romanesque church, but I know of others more beautiful upon my route, and I am not allured by the frescoes of Guercino or Carracci; why should one on his way to Bologna seek out the works of these painters, which he remembers having seen to satiety, almost with nausea? The Madonna di Campagna possesses some famous frescoes by Pordenone; but are they better than those of the Malchiostro Chapel at Treviso, or those in Cremona Cathedral, which I thought so declamatory beside the works of Romanino? I recall a chapel in this little church of Piacenza, with a strange *Birth of the Virgin*, in which Saint Anne and the infant Mary are merely a pretext for the attitudes of servants in sumptuous robes, a work the art of which, skilful and superficial, is too obviously lacking in emotion. And as San Sisto has only a copy of Raphael's *Madonna*, now the pride of the Dresden Gallery, I elect to saunter through the streets of the town this bright and joyous evening, to admire the gay façades of pink brick, and stroll down to the river. But here a cruel disappointment awaits me; the old bridge of boats admired by so many travellers is partly demolished; a heavy stone bridge now unites the two banks of the Po, and to give access to this, they are pulling down old houses, and laying out a wide commonplace avenue with a tramway and electric lamps. A big slice of the majestic



landscape of former days is now barred and spoilt by gigantic arches of masonry. Alas! it is the problem that presents itself in all old cities! And can we blame those who strive to live again and shake off their torpor, who desire to obey the law of progress, especially when, as in this case, nothing essential has to disappear?

## CHAPTER II

## BORGO SAN DONNINO

It is much to be regretted that at the exit from Piacenza by the Porta San Lazzaro there is no splendid triumphal arch to match that of Rimini, at the other end of the Via Emilia. After passing through a few suburbs which prolong the town a little, the road rapidly approaches the Apennines, of which there is a series of fine views. The rich fat country stretches out before one as far as the eye can reach. Though I see it every year, the amazing fertility of this plain of the Po never fails to fill me with astonishment. We advance as between a double green hedge pierced by the golden rays of the sun. There is an endless succession of fruitful orchards whose trees arrest the eye. The cicadas utter their shrill cries, and seem as it were the soul of this gay and luminous landscape — Anacreon's cicadas, "who care only to sing, who know not suffering, and are almost akin to the gods." In every one of her aspects, radiant or austere, fair Italy, Dante's *dolce terra latina*, fetters and dominates us like a sorceress. It has been said that a friend who shows us too plainly

that he is trying to form us provokes irritation, whereas a woman who forms us while appearing only to charm us, is adored as a celestial being, the bearer of joy. "It is in this sense," adds M. Maurice Barrès, "that men who for centuries have received all the intoxications of delight from Italy justly call her their mistress."

I am surprised not to encounter more life and movement on the road this bright morning. Only at long intervals do we meet a motor-car, or groups of labourers going to the fields. We need not evoke the period when the tramp of the Roman legions made the causeway tremble, nor the troubled days of the Middle Ages; but how amusing it must have been barely a century ago, with the incessant going and coming of carriages, state-coaches, the escorts of Princes and Cardinals, the troops of soldiers, pilgrims and students! In all ages, moreover, this Via Emilia, like all the other Latin highways, was traversed by artists and men of letters. There was constant communication between France and Italy, especially at the time of the Renaissance. A sojourn in Rome was then, much more than now, the indispensable complement of a good education, and the traveller went thither to develop his intelligence as well as to acquire learning. Montaigne recommends his countrymen to go to Italy, not to learn "how many paces such and such a church measures, but to rub and file the brain against the brains of others." It was already the land chosen by poets in which to express their joy or lament their woe. Maynard, the good Maynard himself, took it for his confidant:

J'ai montré ma blessure aux deux mers d'Italie  
Et fait dire ton nom aux échos étrangers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I showed my wound to the two seas of Italy, and told thy name to the echoes of a strange land.

From the sixteenth century onward, countless Frenchmen have seen their genius develop and have produced their masterpieces there. And it was of Poussin and Claude Lorrain, who both lived in Rome and died there, that Chateaubriand wrote: "Strange that it should have been French eyes which best saw the light of Italy."

There is nothing more amusing than to read the works of the tourists of the past. The books of those who travelled through the Latin land are especially numerous. As far back as 1763, the Abbé Coyer apologised for publishing his impressions in these words: "After so many Travels in Italy formerly or recently published, another Journey in Italy! What could be more wearisome!" But he reassures himself at once, declaring that travellers are privileged to treat matters which have already been studied, and moreover, that Italy is such an inexhaustible mine of documents and works of art that it will never be completely explored. I like these old books—irrespective of the documentary interest there is in knowing what modifications have been brought about by successive civilisations—because they reveal the mental attitude of our forefathers, and are moreover the most delightful of travelling companions. They are never irritated by our gibes and impatience. When by chance we read in them some impression akin to our own we feel such a communicative satisfaction that they seem to be sharing the pleasure of the coincidence. When, on the other hand, we find them entirely alien to our tastes and ideas, how subtle is our amusement. It is most curious to note how artistic sensations may be Poles asunder within an interval of three centuries. Montaigne, for instance, in the lines he devotes to Piacenza, says not a word of the Municipal Palace, which seems to me the most noteworthy thing in the city. And here, at



Borgo San Donnino where I have just arrived, he mentions only the walls the Duke of Parma was putting up round the town, and the preserve of apples and oranges served at his breakfast. Misson, in his famous Journey in 1688, speaks of the statues of Alessandro and Ranuccio Farnese, but never alludes to the Communal Palace. Between Parma and Piacenza he notes merely that he passes through Borgo San Donnino, "a little dismantled town." And in like manner the Abbé Coyer, who was a man of intelligence and an artist, travelling over this same route from Piacenza to Parma, remarks only that he crosses the river Taro, and expresses his surprise that it has no embankments.

And yet how could anyone have failed to devote an hour to the Cathedral of San Donnino, a beautiful Romanesque building, the fine façade of which is remarkable for the three porches adorned with sculptured lions and bas-reliefs? It is one of the most interesting of the series of churches so numerous in Lombardy and the neighbouring provinces that their characteristic style has been christened *Lombard*. All the cities in the plain of the Po: Milan, Pavia, Cremona, Verona, Ferrara, to name the most important; all those upon the Via Emilia: Piacenza which we have just quitted, Parma, Modena, Bologna, our present destination, have, like Borgo San Donnino, old cathedrals built in the course of the twelfth century. This Lombard style, in spite of the theories of certain students, who have been misled by the assumption that many of these buildings were much earlier than they actually are, is merely derivative, a variation of the Romanesque. To be even more exact, this architecture is but a survival of Roman art, transformed by the new Romanesque art which was flourishing so magnificently in France. But here, as in all else, the Italians were original, even

as imitators, and their energies were directed to the exterior of the monument, notably the façade, which became a decorative work whose details, though often useless and arbitrary, are always strikingly effective. Blind arcades supported by miniature columns are multiplied unnecessarily to produce graceful galleries. Luxuriant ornament invades walls and porches. Here in the Cathedral of San Donnino, the sculptures are probably by the artist whose name is associated with the Cathedral and Baptistery of Parma: Benedetto Antelami. And as in the architecture, in this infant statuary Northern influences are evident. Antelami was undoubtedly familiar with French work; it might even be supposed that he had worked at Arles, so closely do the carved reliefs imitate the frieze in the porch of Saint Trophime, and so great is the affinity between the statues of David and Ezekiel and those still to be seen on the façade of Saint Gilles.

After Borgo San Donnino, several little towns are passed; then the way leads across the interminable bed of the Taro on a splendid, monumental bridge affording a fine view of the sullen flanks of the Apennines. The ever fertile plain surges, a verdant sea, on either side of the road. Here and there groups of trees rise above fields and orchards, pines and poplars which still mingle their shade as in the days of Horace:

*Pinus ingens albaque populus  
Umbram hospitalem consociare amant  
Ramis.*<sup>1</sup>

But the silhouettes of the towers and spires of Parma are already visible on the horizon. By the Via Massimo d'Azeglio, the Via Emilia penetrates into the heart of the city of Correggio.

<sup>1</sup> Immense pines and pale poplars love to mingle their boughs in hospitable shade.

## CHAPTER III

## PARMA

No artist exercises so instant and irresistible an influence on a writer who is not primarily an art-critic as Antonio Allegri da Correggio. I remember the impression I received when years ago, I first entered the small rooms reserved for him in the Parma Gallery. Never had I yet been confronted by works which seemed to communicate their inward fire to me so swiftly and so intimately. As from those great lyrics which carry you away and kindle in you the ardour of their own inspiration, so from these pictures such a flame of emotion bursts forth that you have not time to reason or to analyse your agitation. The serious Buckhardt himself speaks of "intoxication," and goes on to describe his emotion as "dæmonic." It is because Correggio is above all a poet. Critics may argue as to the influences which formed him, may hesitate between Mantegna, Lorenzo Costa, Raphael, Dosso and others, may question whether or no he visited Rome; not thus will they explain Correggio, an original genius who owed nothing to any person, to any teaching, to any school, to any city, and in respect of whom we might almost use the term *spontaneous generation*. He simply allowed his heart to speak, and expressed, not in sounds but in colour, the music within him. And because he had no master but his own inspiration, he was one of the most original of painters. No other varied so much; no other modified his manner so often, simply in obedience to the moving caprice of his dream of beauty,



for which he incessantly created anew the means of expression dictated by his fancy.

This solitary spirit was born, moreover, in one of the Italian towns least affected by pictorial activities. These scarcely began in Parma before the end of the fifteenth century, and the few local artists of repute seem almost barbarous compared with those then working in Florence, Padua, Venice or Mantua. After Correggio, again, we find the same mediocrity. His genius was too individual for the creation of a school; not one of his imitators save Parmigiano produced a single interesting work. No other artistic centre which had boasted such a master, ever descended at once to the level of works so feeble and unattractive.

Some critics deal severely with Correggio, and insist more especially on what is lacking in him; I confess that I am deeply moved by this exuberant soul, whose sensations flow forth like swelling waves. What joy he must have felt in painting! With that instinctive perception often shown by poets Musset describes him as:

Travaillant pour son cœur, laissant à Dieu le reste.<sup>1</sup>

No heart was ever more guileless and more sensitive, more vibrant and more ecstatic. But we must not look for psychology, nor intellectuality, nor depth of thought in his works; we must seek the joy of life, serene pleasure, voluptuous delight. Never was feminine flesh rendered with so much emotion. Remember the *Danæe* in the Borghese Gallery, the *Antiope* in the Louvre, the provocative *Leda* in the Berlin Museum, and above all, the rapt *Io* at Vienna. No painter ever ventured so far without leaving grace behind, as Schuré

<sup>1</sup> Working for his own heart, leaving the rest to God.

once said; his canvases burn and quiver, but their fervour redeems their audacity.

Allegri was the painter of joy. His works breathe an intimate happiness; they are worthy of him who sometimes signed himself *Lieto* (joyful). In spite of Vasari's gossip, it is probable that he was perfectly happy, and that few artists had a life of such unity; one love, his wife; one passion, his art. For nine years his existence, divided between the two, passed sweetly and calmly as a lovely dream. After the death of Geronima Merlini, he lived solely for his work, drawing a new power from his sorrow. It matters little that I am unable to say why his art delights me. Can we analyse the charm of a falling rose, a reflection in the water, a feminine glance? Do we know why certain verses, more than any others, move us to tears? As long as there are passionate natures, Correggio will intoxicate them, and no place will be more delightful to them than the city of Parma, which is still ablaze with his genius.

How many hours I have spent in the Pilotta, in the convent of San Paolo, in the Cathedral and in San Giovanni Evangelista! There are, of course, other marvels here, such as the Baptistery, and other good pictures in the Museum, but in Correggio's city I care only to see his works, and even among these I have my favourites. I daresay that the most stupendous of these are the wonderful cupolas, where he found full scope for his poetic art, those cupolas which an ignorant Canon compared to a "hash of frogs" but for which Titian declared the artist would still have been inadequately paid, had they been turned upside down and filled with gold for him. Unfortunately, they have deteriorated, and they are difficult to see; my pious pilgrimage leads me to less imposing works.

The first is the magnificent portrait of the Apostle in San Giovanni Evangelista. Nothing could be more moving in its quiet simplicity than this head painted in a kind of lunette above the door leading to the cloisters of the Chapter House. The artist wished to represent S. John at Patmos. The beloved disciple is certainly younger than he was when he retired to the island; but Correggio always loved to render youthful grace of a type akin to feminine beauty. The face of the Saint is illuminated by the dazzling apparition; we feel that the Evangelist, transfigured and exalted, obeys the divine command almost involuntarily. He is truly the Seer. His burning eyes, the eyes not of one hallucinated, but of a visionary, probe the depths of infinity. *Altius Dei patefecit arcana*<sup>1</sup> as Correggio has written upon the canvas. All veils are torn away. S. John sees the eternal verities and penetrates into the essence of things. He looks fearlessly at the flaming Archangel, who holds the book with seven seals and reveals the supreme secrets. The symbolic eagle is plucking a feather from its wing, as if to offer it to its master that he may forthwith set down the terrific visions of the Apocalypse. The intensity of the colour, the transparency of the chiaroscuro give this fresco the appearance of an oil-painting. Time and a few retouches have injured it somewhat; but in spite of this, the impression it produces is still profound, and I linger before it till I am put to flight by the importunate commentary of the sacristan, and the turning on of the electric lights with which sacrilegious admiration has surrounded the work.

In the little room of the Museum, however, I am allowed to study the *Madonna with S. Jerome* in peace. Of all the painter's masterpieces, this is the

<sup>1</sup> He revealed more deeply the secret things of God.



most perfect and the most complete. All his qualities find their highest expression here ; the magic of light could not be carried further. The very shadows are full of colour. And what a melting brush, at once light and luscious, has suggested the transparent skins and velvety carnations ! Well might Vasari declare this picture to be *colorito di maniera meravigliosa e stupenda*.<sup>1</sup>

We overlook the defects that might be noted in the S. Jerome and his somewhat ridiculous lion, and see only the inimitable and unforgettable central group : the Virgin, the Babe, the angel, and above all, the Magdalen, the loveliest and sweetest figure left us by the painter of feminine grace. The supple attitude is incomparable ; we divine the movement of the body under the folds of the violet robe and the splendid golden yellow drapery. The hands are wonderfully painted, and the adoring gesture is one of the happiest inventions of the master : the Magdalen lays her cheek almost voluptuously against the Child's leg. The picture is in such excellent preservation and so brilliant that it looks as if it had been lately finished ; the tones have all the splendour of the first day, and yet they never clash, but are fused into absolute harmony. It is a triumph of the *sfumato* which reigns throughout the canvas, even in the upper part, where a peaceful bluish landscape is displayed under the folds of a great red curtain. The Virgin is seated on a rustic mound ; grass and flowers at her feet give the serenity of a rural scene to the picture.

Beside this canvas all the rest, even the famous *Madonna with the Bowl*, pale a little. In the Palatine Library, however, there is a figure which may almost rival the Magdalen ; it is a *Madonna blessed by Jesus*,

<sup>1</sup> Coloured in a marvellous and stupendous manner.

the fragment of a painting originally in the hemicycle of San Giovanni Evangelista, and now over a door at the end of a long corridor. The enlargement of the choir of the church in 1587 entailed the destruction of the fresco, only the central part of which was preserved. The various fragments reproduced by the Carracci before its destruction, and the copy by Aretusi which replaces the original in the apse of San Giovanni Evangelista still enable us to form an idea of the composition as a whole. The essential portion was, happily, the fragment preserved in the Palatine Library. If the Christ is mediocre, the Virgin is very remarkable. Allegri never painted a head more expressive and more serene. The divine Mother folds her hands and bends her head to receive the crown from her Son with an exquisite gesture of gravity and submission. I remember seeing in the Louvre a study by Correggio in which the Virgin has the same delicious action of the folded arms; but the Parma head is greatly superior. I have a special affection for it, perhaps because it has escaped destruction, and perhaps, too, because it was beloved of Stendhal. "The *Madonna blessed by Jesus*, in the Library moved me even to tears," he declared. "I shall never forget the downcast eyes of this Virgin, nor her passionate attitude, nor the simplicity of her draperies."

I do not know if Stendhal was much in Parma, and many improbabilities in his famous novel might lead one to suppose the contrary; but it is certain that he never forgot Correggio. "He who has never seen his works," he says, "knows nothing of the power of painting. Raphael's figures have the statues of antiquity for rivals. As feminine love did not exist in antiquity, Correggio is without a rival. But to be worthy to understand him, a man must have made

himself ridiculous in the service of this passion." Here we have the secret of his admiration. If his dictum be true, no one could boast higher qualifications for such comprehension than Beyle. When he came to Parma for the first time on December 19th, 1816, and saw the "sublime frescoes," he had just left Milan, his eyes, his heart and his mind full of one of the women he had loved most passionately, and who played the most important part in his life. He could think only of this Metilde Viscontini who seemed to him "a more beautiful version of Leonardo's charming Herodias." Had he any presentiment at the time that for nine years she would be the most ardent passion of his life, that he would beg for her love as a starving man begs for bread, and that she would die without yielding to him? Perhaps he had some vague and secret premonition of all this when he declared bitterly that he had never been able to charm any but women to whom he was himself indifferent. Be this as it may, he never forgot Allegri's Madonnas. On May 6th, 1817, he travelled to Correggio to visit the master's birthplace, and was delighted to find "his soft eyed Madonnas moving about the streets disguised as peasants." And I believe that the while he evoked the languorous shores of Lake Como, he recalled the grace of the Correggian heroines when he found such moving words to paint the exaltation of La Sanseverina.

Indeed, where would the passion of love find a more favourable soil than in this city of Parma, surrounded by broad shady ramparts dominating a vast horizon which invites to reverie and meditation? What places evoke more voluptuous dreams than the park of that citadel in which Fabrice del Dongo languished, or the shade of those chestnut trees in the gardens of the former ducal palace, where Napoleon's forgetful wife



indulged her belated passions? Dante's immortal verse rises instinctively to the lips:

Tutti li miei pensier parlan d'amore.<sup>1</sup>

and how sweet is this summer evening in the deserted alleys! On the grass, studded in spring-time with pale violets, the broad dead leaves have laid a rusty mantle, touched here and there into burning patches by the slanting sunbeams. Wisterias, suggestive of bygone mourning garments, recall the memory of those who once wandered among these groves. A little Arcadian temple on an island in an artificial lake further reminds us of the evanescence of our joys. I am haunted by Lorenzo de' Medici's verses, the refrain of the *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*:

Quant' è bella giovinezza  
Che si fugge tuttavia!  
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia:  
Di doman non c'è certezza.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### MODENA

AFTER passing through impoverished Reggio and crossing the Secchia on a handsome stone bridge, one feels an almost physical satisfaction as one sights the towers of Modena, and under the vault of the Porta Sant' Agostino perceives the bright houses on either

<sup>1</sup> All my thoughts speak of love.

<sup>2</sup> How fair is youth which yet flees fast! Let him who will, enjoy. There is no certainty of to-morrow.

side of the Via Emilia. Few cities look more inviting to the approaching traveller. Painted façades, pleasant arcades, broad, clean streets animated by lively crowds give it the appearance characteristic of more important centres. True, the setting is sometimes a little theatrical, and we are conscious that we are nearing Bologna; but on the whole, it is just the agreeable aspect and atmosphere I remember. The happy impression is enhanced, on this occasion, by the ease of mind of a traveller who knows exactly what he wants to see again, and who, in the intervals of his predetermined visits, is free to idle as he pleases, amusing himself with the thousand picturesque details of Italian streets. This is one of the subtlest delights of a return to a city rich in masterpieces; we have friends among them who perhaps make us unjust to the rest, and it is delicious to know beforehand how they will receive us.

Modena has always been somewhat neglected by tourists, who rarely speak of it, or mention it only as a halting-place on their travels. If President de Brosses was pleased by it, it was because he arrived in the middle of the Carnival. It must indeed have been lively enough at the Court of the Duke and Duchess of Modena in those days, and the good Burgundian turned his back regretfully on the town where he had met a compatriot, "Mademoiselle Grognet, formerly a dancer at the Opéra Comique and the favourite of Mademoiselle Sallé, now the first dancer of the Duchy, and high in the good graces of certain ladies of the city."

For those, who, like myself, are in search of the best only in each of these Italian towns, Modena is easily summed up: there is a very fine Cathedral, and a school of terra-cotta sculpture. Its picture gallery contains works of importance to students of the various Emilian

Schools, whose numerous painters are very little known, and we find here a fresh example of that happy decentralisation which made each city an art centre ; but I pass the door of the Museum without regret on these fine mornings. It is much pleasanter to go and dream upon the old ramparts which, as at Parma, surround the city with a girdle of leafy shade, whence one sees the dark outline of the Apennines gradually blurred by a blue mist as the heat increases.

The external decorations of Modena Cathedral are among the richest and most complete that any of the Lombardo-Romanesque churches can boast. They are not confined to the façade, but are continued on the sides. A graceful gallery with delicate triple columns runs all round the church, enframed in larger arches. The various doors open under vaults upheld in the customary fashion by lions ; one of them is perhaps the earliest example of those Lombard doors which were transformed into porches. Before this, as in the old churches of Pavia for instance, the doors did not project ; here, on the contrary, an archivolt with two bas-reliefs representing monsters overhangs the bay. Several other sculptures complete the decoration ; they reproduce scenes of the Book of Genesis, from the birth of Adam to Noah, and we are fortunate enough to be able to decipher the signature of the artist with the date 1099 on a scroll held by the prophets Enoch and Elijah. He was Wiligelmus or Guglielmo, the artist who worked at San Zeno, Verona. As at Borgo San Donnino, French influences are apparent in this sculpture ; I need but instance the door near the Campanile, with the two episodes from the history of Renart on the lintel, and the knight representing Arthur of Brittany on the architrave.

The interior of the church is unfortunately by no



means equal to the exterior ; it has been spoilt by restorations. I enter only to go down into the crypt, guarded by lions and dwarfs, to see Guido Mazzoni's *Adoration*. My memory did not play me false ; it is a realistic work, the harsh naturalism and violence of which offend the eye. A nun and St. Joseph are kneeling before the Virgin ; an ugly, ill-clad servant with torn sleeves bends forward. The figures bear little relation one to the other, and are somewhat ridiculous on the whole. This group, however, is not the best work of Modanino ; and one must go to San Giovanni Decollato to get a truer idea of the sculptor. Here, in the simple rotunda that opens on the Via Emilia is the *Pietà*, his masterpiece. The group is much more important than the *Adoration* in the Cathedral. In the foreground Christ is lying, not on His Mother's breast, as critics, repeating Burckhardt's inaccurate description, assert, but on the ground. The seven persons who mourn for Him really take part in the action ; the general effect is most striking. The expression of grief, very skilfully differentiated, achieves real pathos, especially in the face of the Virgin where it has a dramatic intensity. No doubt there are vulgarities and evidences of bad taste in this group ; but it would be unjust to pass it over altogether, or dismiss it with a shrug of the shoulders.

Neither would it be just to treat Begarelli, as so many have done, with disdainful silence. True, he was incapable of setting up a single torso or modelling a figure apart from a common action ; he started from a false principle when he attempted to model in clay pictures which had to be placed in special niches and looked at from a fixed point like a painting. But granting this, it cannot be denied that he had the great gifts of composition, truth, and vitality. It is,

of course, absurd to compare him to Sansovino, or to take Michelangelo's exclamation too literally. If, as Vasari tells us, he cried when he saw the works of the Modenese: "Woe to the statues of antiquity, if this clay should become marble!" it was no doubt because he saw in these realistic essays a happy reaction against the growing insipidity of Florentine and Roman idealism.

Modena owns many works by the most famous of her sons; to my mind, the best are *The Descent from the Cross* in San Francesco, and the *Pietà* in San Pietro. In the first, there are thirteen life-size figures: above, four persons standing on ladders lower the corpse of the crucified Saviour; at the sides four Saints contemplate the tragic scene; the principal group in the centre, the swooning Virgin supported by three women, is very moving. Although the actors in the sacred drama are all treated with a noble gravity and vigour, the general effect is not very harmonious, and I prefer the *Pietà* in San Pietro, which contains but four figures: Nicodemus raising the body of Christ and the kneeling Virgin leaning upon S. John. As it was the artist's ambition to produce a pathetic picture, it must be allowed that he was entirely successful. The work has simplicity and grandeur; we even recognise a veritable emotion. But for faults of taste in the fullness and flutter of the draperies, we might admire unreservedly, though I think Burckhardt goes too far when he declares that "this group attains the serene heights of the masterpieces of the sixteenth century."

My chief quarrel with Mazzoni and Begarelli is that they falsified the principles of sculpture and thus opened the road to every aberration. They were to some extent the precursors and the creators of the art that flourishes in the shops around Saint Sulpice. How

can I judge the masters of Modena impartially, when I remember the Nativities, the Crucifixions, the Adorations, all the abominations in terra-cotta, wax and papier-mâché that disfigure our churches?

## CHAPTER V

### BOLOGNA

WHAT strikes me most each time I revisit Bologna is the effort the city is making to become an important centre. Its great ambition is to equal Florence, its neighbour and rival. Admirably situated at the intersection of the great railway systems of the peninsula, it might aspire to become the capital of Italy, if the choice of a capital were determined solely by economic considerations. In any case, it is determined not to remain merely "learned Bologna," and were it to issue a new coinage, it is unlikely that it would be content with its old device: *Bologna docet*. In spite of its rapid growth, its streets are often melancholy and empty, save in the vicinity of the picturesque Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, with its girdle of fine buildings, and of the Piazza del Nettuno with the fountain by Giovanni da Bologna, that Frenchman whose works no less than his name often cause him to be taken for an Italian. The special charm of the town lies in the fact that its activities are displayed in the setting where they have developed; it has avoided levellings and straight lines; some of its roads describe veritable curves. Very little has been demolished, merely a few houses



to open up the central squares and arteries. Nearly all the streets have preserved their irregular arcades and their unexpected aspects ; there is infinite variety in the amusing caprice of these arcades, under the shelter of which it is possible to explore nearly the whole of the town.

A further impression we get from Bologna is that everything there is done for effect. The majority of the houses look like palaces, with sumptuous entrances, colonnades, inner courts, terraces and galleries. The façades are intended to impress. And in no Italian town is more attention paid to dress. The young civilians and officers who saunter for hours together in the Piazza del Nettuno have bestowed the most elaborate care on their toilets, not always escaping a certain touch of bad taste. The elegance of the Bolognese ladies charmed President de Brosses. "They dress in the French fashion," he says, "and better than anywhere else. Every day big dolls are sent to them, dressed from head to foot in the latest fashion, and they wear no trinkets that do not come from Paris." The cafés are more numerous than in any Italian town, and are situated even in the most frequented thoroughfares. The restaurants and the hairdressers' shops are open to the street ; huge mirrors enable their customers to eat and shave in public as it were. The Bolognese are the true children of their painting, and their outer life is akin to the canvases in their museums.

I did not intend to go to the Accademia this year, remembering the many times I had come out weary and dissatisfied. However, I wanted to ask myself in the presence of the works themselves, why their authors had so long ranked with the greatest artists of the world. Why, above all, the School of Bologna, hitherto obscure and almost non-existent, suddenly took the first place

at the close of the sixteenth century ? This has been very well explained in a recent article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by M. Marcel Reymond. He shows the necessity that had arisen for a renewal of religious art, and the inability of the other schools to initiate this revival. Bologna, untouched alike by the Florentine Renaissance and Venetian sensuality, near enough to Milan and to Parma to receive the great traditions of Leonardo and Correggio, was the learned and religious centre required for the establishment of the new logical art in which the form was to be the faithful servant of the idea, and expression was to be subordinated to conception.

The three Carracci evolved the theory which was at least ingenious, that in order to create a model school, it was only necessary to take the best elements from each of the others. Agostino, in an artless poem, has left us a receipt for the making of a good picture. It will suffice to give it "the drawing of the Romans, the movement and shadows of the Venetians, the fine colour of the Lombard painters, the sublimity of Michelangelo, the truth of Titian, the pure taste of Correggio, the harmony of Raphael, the solid proportions of Pellegrino, the invention of the learned Primaticcio, and a little of Parmigiano's grace." To this receipt we owe the works I have just been looking at again. Well, I can understand the admiration felt for them at the time when they were painted, for they were in perfect harmony with a certain phase of thought and feeling. I can understand too why they should still retain the favour of Catholics and of all those who look for edification or pathos in pictures ; but what I cannot understand is why they should so long have been accepted as the very consummation of art.

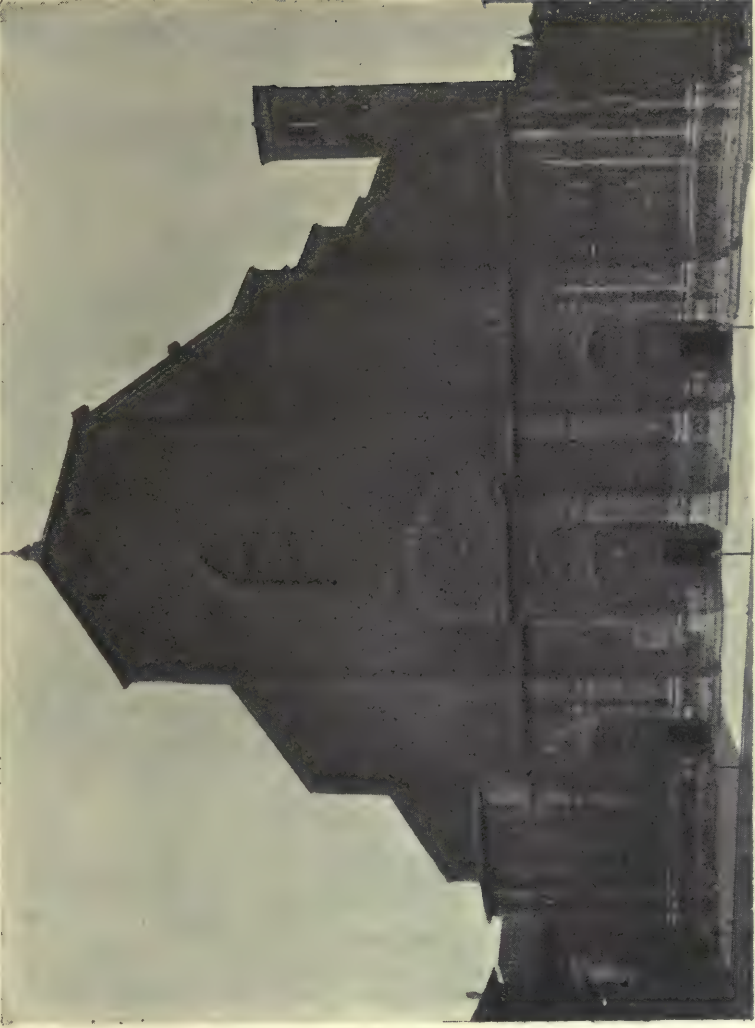
It must not be supposed that I am in danger of going

to the other extreme. I recognise the great technical mastery displayed in many of these canvases; it is natural enough that a painter should praise the handling and seek to learn something from it. But what surprises me more and more is the fact that refined and subtle spirits, men of taste, writers—and these some of the most illustrious—should also have been enraptured by these declamatory works painted not from the heart but from the brain. Without going back to De Brosses who exhausts all the resources of his style to express his admiration, I need only open Stendhal to learn that Guercino is sublime and that Annibale Carracci is equal to Raphael. “The School of Bologna,” he says in his *History of Painting in Italy*, “which came later, was to imitate all the great painters successfully, and Guido Reni may be said to have carried beauty to the sublimest heights ever attained by man.” More recently M. Maurice Barrès has not hesitated “to prefer to the Primitives and even to the painters of the first half of the fifteenth century Guido, Domenichino, Guercino, the Carracci and their rivals, who have given us such rich and powerful analyses of passion.” How can this wonderful writer, susceptible as he is to beauty, prefer the art of the Bolognese to the art of the fifteenth century (that radiant and adorable Quattrocento, when the fervid, ingenuous souls of artists turned so eagerly and enquiringly to Nature), to those works of freshness and sincerity in which truth and fancy, the real and the ideal are so artlessly intermingled; that springtide of beauty, the touching candour of which breathes a perfume as of eternal youth. Compared with these old masters who give themselves up so simply to their inspiration, allow their hearts to speak, and so achieve real eloquence, the Bolognese seem to me amazingly clever orators, erudite and sympathetic, who substitute



science for emotion, and only manage to construct fine phrases, empty and sonorous. Their works are pretentiously dramatic. True, they accumulate a vast number of things on a canvas and the action appears intense; but on closer examination, we see it is a factitious life, due to studio formulas. And yet these works were the delight of the eighteenth century, that age of taste and intelligence. There where I see nothing but skill and declamation, the subtlest of mankind admired fire and passion. To the artists of those days Bologna was a capital of art no less than Rome; the most delightful of our own masters learned their craft there. It is true that the seventeenth century had demolished many of the masterpieces of the Primitives, and exalted the Baroque and Jesuit styles. We must not be too absolute. In works of art there is much that we add ourselves, and we love them in proportion to the manner in which they respond to our sentiments, our conceptions, our personal ideals. We men of letters see beauty in the things that move us. We can only offer subjective criticism—not the worst kind of criticism, perhaps. We do not care for a picture because of the difficulties overcome or the skill displayed by the painter, but because it stirs our emotions. And may the history of the Bolognese always remind us that it is dangerous to judge for eternity!

The same thoughts occur to me before the admirable doorway of San Petronio. Only of late years has justice been done to Jacopo della Quercia, and even now he does not enjoy the fame which rightly belongs to one of the greatest of Italian sculptors. Nowhere can we better appreciate the genius of the Sienese master in all its power than here. It is strange indeed that Bologna, which always showed such a strong affection



SAN PETRONIO, BOLOGNA.





for sculpture—a tendency natural enough in a city so careful of scenic effect—had no good native sculptors and was obliged to rely on its more skilful neighbours for the decoration of buildings and open spaces. Thus it invited Niccolò Pisano, the Venetians, Dalle Maxegne and Lanframi, Andrea da Fiesole, the Florentine Tribolo, Alfonso Lombardi of Ferrara, Jean Bologne of Douai and many others to work within its walls.

When Bologna started to build San Petronio, it hoped to raise a cathedral which would rival the Duomo of Florence and be one of the largest churches in the world. Unfortunately only the nave was completed. The choir and transepts were abandoned, faith and more especially money having failed. But the conception has given a special majesty to this great church which will never be finished. The Bolognese, desiring a sumptuous façade, applied to Jacopo della Quercia, whose Fonte Gaja had just made him famous. It was in 1425 that the contract between the Legate of Pope Martin V. and the Sienese artist was approved. In it the decoration of the central door of San Petronio was entrusted to Della Quercia, and the payment fixed at 3,600 florins. Numerous historians have related the details of this enterprise which lasted two years; at the death of the sculptor in 1438, it was not quite finished, and became a subject of contention. But we need not concern ourselves overmuch with the story, which Perkins called without undue exaggeration the *tragedy of the door*. What matters it whether the delays were due to Jacopo's natural slowness, to his neglect, or to other causes? Let us be content to contemplate the work.

The sculptures of this porch are almost entirely by the hand of Jacopo. On the pilasters there are ten bas-

reliefs, representing scenes of Old Testament history ; on the architrave five bas-reliefs reproducing episodes of the life of Christ ; above this lintel, three statues : the Virgin, S. Ambrose, and S. Petronius bearing a model of the church. There are further on the inner face of the uprights, and on the arch over the door, thirty-three half-length figures of prophets ; but these medallions, of minor importance, are probably not all by the master. His authorship of the majority, however, can hardly be disputed, in view of the powerful modelling of some of the heads and hands. As to the fifteen bas-reliefs, they are so many masterpieces, which make the strongest impression on the spectator. It is impossible to forget the *Birth of Adam*, for instance, in which the first man wakes to life with a truly startling gesture of amazement, and the *Creation of Eve*, whose charming face already expresses the most timid curiosity. These two reliefs were the admiration of Michelangelo, who sought inspiration from them while magnifying them by his own genius. And was it not a great honour for Jacopo to have suggested to the master of the Sistine Chapel that wonderful *Birth of Adam* in which God, bending from the clouds, bestows life and intelligence on His creature by touching him with His finger ? The most beautiful of the reliefs on the architrave is that of the *Flight into Egypt*. Jacopo's Virgins have always a poignant expression ; here it is extraordinary. Bending over the Babe as if to protect Him already against invisible evils. Mary seems to bear on her anxious face all the marvellous and tragic destiny of her divine Son. Jacopo is indeed a man apart in his century, and above all, apart from the Florentines. He is not a Renaissance artist at all, but a master of the transition, who links the sculptors of the pulpits at Siena and Pisa to the sculptor of the tombs of the

Medici. He is in a sense the last of the Gothic artists. He is intent on grand lines, on ample, soberly-treated form, rather than on the graceful precision and realism of the Quattrocento. He neglects detail and accessories ; he seeks only to render the movement of soul and body ; he is eager to express life in all its power and variety. Was not his art that which first revealed itself in the ingenuous works of the Pisan masters, and blossomed forth a century later in the reasoned art of Michelangelo ?

Like Correggio, Jacopo della Quercia was an isolated figure. He may be said to have had neither master nor pupil. He grew up at Siena, where he learned his craft by studying the pulpit of Niccolò Pisano and the Gothic artists who were working at the building of the Duomo ; it was to them that he owed his occasionally archaic style, the fullness of his draperies, the heaviness of his stuffs and folds. At Florence he seems to have been attracted chiefly by Giotto and Andrea Pisano, if we may judge by some of the bas-reliefs of San Petronio, which resemble those of the famous Campanile in arrangement. He sent in an *Abraham's Sacrifice* to the competition for the Baptistery doors which has not come down to us, but which he probably used for one of the sculptures of San Petronio. Vasari tells us that the figures of this composition were considered good, but inelegant : *non avevano finezza*. And it is obvious that Jacopo's robust art must have seemed harsh to the subtle and refined Florentines.

The Sienese master has had no more able interpreter than M. Marcel Reymond. I think he exaggerates a little when he declares that Jacopo's works dominate Italian art, that they rank with those of Phidias, and that all Ghiberti's grace is eclipsed by his grandeur ; but it is evident enough that they are the only achieve-



ments of the fifteenth century which foreshadow the mighty conceptions of Michelangelo.

Bologna has preserved other works by Jacopo della Quercia: two bas-reliefs in the Museum, and at San Giacomo Maggiore the tomb of the Jurisconsult, Antonio Galeazzo Bentivoglio. The latter is truly representative both of the art of statuary and of the University town which bestowed sumptuous tombs on its professors. On the front of the sarcophagus we see the master surrounded by pupils, who, seated at their desks, receive his instruction attentively; the dead man is represented again above, lying at full length on an inclined plane, his head and feet resting on huge folios. Jacopo's work is admirably composed and very stately in effect. The face of the recumbent figure is full of nobility. Tombs are often the monuments in which sculptors put the best of themselves, and this because we cannot think of death without gravity and emotion.

Among the memories we bring back from our travels, the strongest are often those connected with this idea. I cannot think of the delights of the Italian lakes without recalling the hour I spent in a little burial ground at the edge of the sparkling waters. And so, too, in our visions of art, those which speak to us of death leave the most durable impressions. The King of Terrors has always been the great inspirer of artists.

## CHAPTER VI

### FAENZA AND CESENA

THIS part of the Via Emilia is the most interesting of all, from the picturesque point of view. To the right the traveller skirts the last spurs of the Apennines almost continuously, and can distinguish the villages nestling in the folds of their slopes, clustered round slender campaniles. Behind Bologna, above the roofs of the town, rise the heights of the Monte della Guardia and the Madonna di San Luca, whence one surveys a magnificent panorama, extending in clear weather from the Alps to the Adriatic. As one advances on the road, there is a series of fine views into each of the gorges through which the torrents descend, some to the Reno, the others straight to the sea. To the left, on the other hand, is Romagna, a low, damp region abounding in marshes, an interminable plain which extends as far as the eye can reach, to the lagoons we divine on the horizon. Dante indicated its boundaries accurately enough when he said that it stretched

Tra il Po, il monte e la marina e il Reno.<sup>1</sup>

Although less fertile than the land on the other side of Bologna, the district is rich and well cultivated. Great white oxen, six, eight and even ten pairs yoked together, plough up the fat soil. And ever, as if to give a festal aspect to the famous highway, the vines hang their garlands from one *pioppo* to the other. The heavy clusters of berries are swollen to the point of bursting. We are nearing the vintage time, that autumn equinox which d'Annunzio declares to be the most enchanting

<sup>1</sup> Between the Po, the mountain and sea, and the Reno.

season of the year, because it exhales a sort of aerial intoxication emanating from the ripe grapes.

And now I suddenly recognise an inn, a rustic *osteria*, where I halted once before one summer day in I forget what year. Instead of waiting for the meal that will be ready for me at Faenza, in a low, airless room, I decide to enjoy some frugal fare with a bottle of cool *lambrusco*, that Emilian wine which has the savour of our French sapling vines. There are times when the blood of my peasant forbears throbs strongly in my veins, and I feel the need of living nearer to Nature. When I have finished my meal, I am reluctant to start again at once, under the burning sunshine that is scorching the road white. Through the arches of the pergola, I see the rich landscape drowsing in the mid-day heat. Two cypresses rise high into the air, and stand out sharply against the sky; their tall heads rustle sonorously with a sound that recalls a verse of Theocritus. An oleander completes the eclogue. Bees fly past with a musical murmur. And half asleep, I see myself many years ago gazing upon this same scene. I remember distinctly how I watched the tops of these cypresses swaying against the sky. Then, suddenly, as in a magic dream, everything about me disappears under the spell of a mirage akin to that *fata morgana* which appears on the coasts of Reggio on certain brilliant evenings, and transports the dazzled sailors to unreal shores. I am standing again on the sunburnt terrace whence my first childish dreams took flight. And I feel the same agitation I used to feel, an inexplicable agitation, a kind of panic terror born of the motionless brightness of noon, the enveloping silence, the complete torpor of things. . . .

But it is getting late; it is time to start. The long wide ribbon of the Via Emilia runs in a straight line



through towns of martial aspect: Castel San Pietro, Imola girdled with walls, dominated by its massive Rocca, and Castel Bolognese, a big borough also surrounded by well preserved ramparts with their corner towers and circular bastions, an ancient fortress where, it is said, Piccinino vanquished Gattamelata.

And here is Faenza, its central square bordered with fine arcades and handsome buildings, among them the Cathedral which vaguely suggests a San Petronio on a small scale. In the Museum I renew my acquaintance with the charming little bust of *S. John*, which Burckhardt attributes to Donatello, but which is probably the work of Rossellino or Desiderio da Settignano, and the wooden *S. Jerome* which, on the other hand, is perhaps by Donatello. A rich collection of pottery recalls the importance of the earlier ceramists of the town; at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century they were highly esteemed. The neighbouring workshops of Cesena, Forlì, Ferrara and Rimini competed with them in vain; a decree dated 1532, found in the archives of Ravenna, forbids the importation and sale of the products of Faenza except on market-days. There are a few modern factories which are trying to revive the industry.

Scarcely have we passed the suburbs of Faenza when the high towers of Forlì appear on the horizon. We begin to meet on the road those little painted carts which are to be found in all the regions near the Adriatic. The hemp fields become more numerous, and the air is heavy with their nauseous stench.

At Forlì, the Via Emilia skirts the Piazza Maggiore—transformed like so many others, into the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele—an imposing space, with its monumental façades, its town-hall, the church of San Mercuriale and a Campanile of Venetian aspect. Forlì

was the birth place of the excellent painter Melozzo ; all we shall see in the Museum is his *Pestapepe*, an apothecary's sign, representing an apprentice pounding a drug in a mortar.

On leaving the town the road is bordered for several miles by a double row of poplars, as far as the river Ronco, now completely dried up. The torrents, much shorter here, flow directly to the Adriatic, and are more formidable than those we have left behind. In the rainy season, and when the snows are melting, they swell in a few hours to raging floods, bearing down all before them. Man has so far been unable to tame them. A great scheme has been outlined for the construction of a vast canal at the foot of the Apennines, the whole length of the chain, to receive the waters as they reach the plain and carry them off to the sea ; but such an enterprise would present the most serious difficulties and entail an immense outlay. A channel of enormous width and depth would be required to contain the volume of water which sometimes issues from all the gorges at the same time. On the other hand, water is so scarce in the summer that it has to be brought in water-carts and sold by the quart.

And the torrents have not been uniformly destructive ; with the earth they brought down from the Apennines, they gradually filled up the marshes which formerly covered a large part of Romagna. They were the most active agents in the levelling and fertilisation undertaken by the Romans, who here again have left us evidences of their genius. When we look at the fields to the left of the road on leaving Faenza, we see that the paths and ditches which divide them are equidistant and parallel, perpendicularly to the Via Emilia. The landscape forms a gigantic chess-board, the squares of which, arranged in regular rectangles, corresponded

to the allotments of the Roman assessors. This arrangement, noticeable in some places before Bologna, is more evident between Imola and Forlì, except in the neighbourhood of the watercourses, where it is effaced by constant inundation and erosion. It was Marcus Æmilius Scaurus who in the year 115 B.C. began the reclamation of this plain, and ordered the digging of the ditches which were to drain the water off into the Po or the Adriatic. Then, having expropriated and expelled the Gauls, the Romans divided up the land into equal portions which they gave over to veterans for drainage and cultivation ; we read in Livy that these *maremme* were measured, and divided among the colonists. This network of roads and canals is two thousand years old. It is curious to see that the Imperial assessment still obtains, and that Nature herself preserves the imprint and proclaims the continuity of Roman genius. These regular divisions cease in the north, following a sinuous line which corresponds to the shores of an ancient lake, the Padusa, a kind of lagoon, separated from the Adriatic only by a strip of sand ; the torrents have gradually filled it up. Thousands of acres, once merely reed-beds, are now rich wheat-fields. All these lowland districts snatched from the waters have a very distinctive character. This was the region described by Francesca when she spoke to Dante of her native place near the sea, " where the Po and its tributaries throw themselves into the sea in search of peace " :

Siede la terra dove nata fui  
Su la marina dove 'l Po discende  
Per aver pace co' seguaci sui.

It is a rich, watery, restless soil, a flat district, a kind of southern Flanders, entirely unlike the rest of Italy, the lines of which are in general so clear and precise.



A few lofty parasol pines in the distance herald the Pineta, and the approach to Ravenna, the ancient city of the Exarchs, now so remote from the world, that city in which, by one of the strange caprices of history, civilisation concentrated for a century, to leave it merely the custodian of tombs. It is comprehensible that Dante, old, weary and wretched, should have chosen this city, already moribund in his day, to die in; here he was able to withdraw from human intercourse, encountering only Imperial ghosts among the deserted streets and funereal pines.

To the right of the Via Emilia, however, Nature has remained smiling and varied. Near Forlimpopoli a series of cheerful hill-side draped with vines have an almost Tuscan grace. On one of them, in a delightful position at the foot of the Monte dei Cappuccini, stands the village of Bertinoro, a former property of the Malatestas, the vineyards of which were already famous in their times. Further on, at the foot of a spur of the Apennines, we come to Cesena. The town, formerly on the mountain-top, has gradually descended into the valley, but in a haphazard fashion which gives it an irregular appearance of a very original kind. The site is pleasant with its crown of green hills dominated, one by a convent, the other by the ruins of a fortress. A little way off is Santa Maria del Monte, a Renaissance church attributed to Bramante. By virtue of a fine bridge over the Savio, and a sixteenth century fountain, Cesena is sometimes called the town *del monte, del ponte e del fonte* (of the mountain, the bridge and the fountain). It is almost unknown to tourists, and yet it can offer them, in addition to its picturesque attractions, one of the most charming libraries in Italy. Few Renaissance buildings were more intelligently planned than this palace, built in 1452 by Matteo

Nuzio, for Malatesta Novello, the brother of the tyrant of Rimini. It comprises several rooms containing precious books and manuscripts, some of which were used for the famous editions of the classics printed by the Venetian, Aldus Manutius. The great hall, some 120 feet long, is a gallery of three aisles, resting on graceful fluted columns of white Codruzzo marble. The happy arrangement of the building was so novel at the time of its inception that Michelangelo was inspired by it in several details of his Medici Library.

After leaving Cesena we cross a series of little streams each of which claims the distinction of being the original Rubicon. The Pisciatello, which is the first we come to, the Fiumicino, which bathes verdant Savignano surrounded by tall poplars, the Uso which reflects the castle of Sant' Arcangelo, compete, and probably will always compete for the honour. Each of the neighbouring cities invokes Strabo, Pliny, the geographers of antiquity or of the Middle Ages in support of its pretensions. In all probability the riddle will never be solved. But what does it matter? There are the towers of Rimini! and here the blue line of the Adriatic and the purple and yellow sails swelled by winds from the East.

## CHAPTER VII

### RIMINI

RIMINI : for how many of us these musical syllables are associated only with a tragic love story and a verse in an immortal poem! Few episodes have been more

popular and few have inspired more artists than that of the hapless passion of Paolo and Francesca. This is due to Dante's pathetic narrative and also to the fact that the brief scene recorded by the poet is a most moving drama of love and death. What lovers would not pity and envy those who were united in the grave by the same dagger? Dante himself is indulgent to the guilty pair, and desires pardon for them; he almost excuses them, laying the blame on destiny, and invoking the triumphant instinct which attracts one sex to the other. What other story teaches so effectively that love is the first aim of life and the surest claim to immortality in the minds of men? We learn the same lesson from the church of San Francesco, dedicated by Sigismondo Malatesta to Isotta, who was originally his mistress, and whom he married after repudiating his first wife, the daughter of a Count of Carmagnola, poisoning the second, Ginevra d'Este, and strangling the third, Polyxena, the natural daughter of one of the Sforzas.

Though we can understand the passion of Paolo for Francesca, whom we may reasonably suppose to have been a desirable creature, we are at a loss to account for the fierce Malatesta's passion for Isotta degli Atti, the daughter of a citizen of Rimini. All extant portraits of her, the medals of Matteo da Pasti and Pisanello, the statue of the Archangel Michael to which Ciuffagni gave her features, the marble bust in the Campo Santo at Pisa represent her as entirely lacking in grace and beauty. She must have been intelligent and cultivated; but perhaps she held Sigismondo captive simply by the tenderness, at once calm and voluptuous, of a woman who knows all the violence and all the lassitude of man's desire. Moreover, how should we be able to read the complex souls of those tyrants who recoiled at no crime,



and yet who sometimes showed the most exquisite delicacy and the most refined taste? By one of the frequent anomalies of human nature, the most cruel of them were also the most enlightened. The verdict of history need not affect our admiration for them; they ordered splendid monuments and were incomparable patrons of art and artists. Among them there is no more striking figure than that of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta who

Mit à sang la Romagne et la Marche et le Golfe,  
Bâtît un temple, fit l'amour et le chanta.<sup>1</sup>

These two lines of a famous sonnet sum up very happily in one of those brief phrases dear to the author of the *Trophées*, the Condottiere who conceived the strange idea of raising a temple to his mistress, or rather, of transforming a Franciscan church into a heathen temple. No trace, indeed, has been left therein of the chaste idyl of S. Francis and "Madame Poverty." We might search in vain for a religious inscription, a Christian image, a sacred symbol; we find on every side antique statues, ephebi, Greek divinities, garlands, wreaths of fruit and flowers; the arms of Malatesta: the elephant and the rose; and above all, Isotta's cipher interlaced with his own.

Sigismondo chose L. B. Alberti as his architect. And Alberti had to solve the same problem which was to present itself a century later to Palladio in the basilica of Vicenza: the utilisation of an old building and its transformation into a new monument. Less fortunate than Palladio, Alberti never saw the completion of his conception: a great building with a dome, of which we get an idea from a letter in which he speaks of a

<sup>1</sup> Who drenched Romagna and the Marches and the Gulf with blood, built a temple, made love and sang it.

cupola like that of Santa Maria dei Fiori, and from the reverse of a medal which Sigismondo caused to be struck in 1450, on the occasion of his jubilee.

Alberti encased the Gothic church in a kind of shell of marble, and respecting the interior chapels, preserved the Gothic bays ; but on the outside he enclosed them in round headed arcades, forming so many niches, the stylobates of which served as bases for the tombs of the poets and learned men pensioned by Malatesta. As he was fettered by no restrictions in the façade, he gave free rein to his imagination here, and achieved a masterpiece. It has the appearance of a triumphal arch : the pretext for the work was, in fact, the celebration of the victory gained by Sigismondo as General of the Florentines over Alfonso of Aragon, as we learn from an inscription on one of the pilasters. This façade, the first produced by the Italian Renaissance, is marvellously effective, though it is unfinished, and still shows the gable of the old Gothic building ; the effect is due entirely to the simplicity and the graceful proportions of the architectural mass. A new art came to birth with L. B. Alberti.

There is no more interesting figure than that of this Italian. Athlete, savant, astronomer, inventor of scientific instruments, man of letters, jurist, a Latinist of such parts that he wrote plays which were long ascribed to Plautus, musician, sculptor, and architect, he was a kind of universal genius, a precursor of Leonardo da Vinci. Politian, despairing of enumerating all his attainments, declared that it were wiser to be silent altogether concerning him than to risk saying too little : *tacere satius puto quam pauca dicere*. He has written on innumerable subjects, and we might find in his works the germs of many modern discoveries. We also read in them formulas which might have been

written by a contemporary: "I appeal not only to artists but to all minds eager for instruction." . . . "By means of study and of art, we must try to understand and express life." . . . "It is not enough to render things faithfully, we must learn to bring out their beauty." . . . When he defines the mission of the artist, he recommends him not to isolate himself, but to seek the society of orators and poets in order to find fresh sources of inspiration in their company. He was the first to draw an analogy between music and architecture and he compared rhythms, forms and sounds very judiciously. The fascination antique monuments had for him probably developed his bent towards architecture. That which interested him above all was creation, the plan. He confided the execution of his designs to others. Thus for the temple at Rimini he applied to the celebrated medallist, Matteo da Pasti; but we must not therefore conclude that he was a roving dilettante who tried his hand at everything more or less. He was a Humanist in all the beauty and all the force of the term. He went back to the sources of antique wisdom. He demanded of art and science the means for controlling his passions; he sought in them consolation for the woes of life. Born in exile in Florence, he kept himself always above pettinesses, jealousies, and hatreds. Nothing could be more admirable in its sovereign sense of justice and humanity than a dissertation on law which he wrote one day at Bologna in a few hours. And how full of wisdom is the formula with which he concludes one of his works: "Virtue is a beautiful thing; kindness is a beautiful thing."

His work at Rimini may be said to inaugurate the Renaissance. Such a movement is not, of course, spontaneous, and could not be initiated by any one



man. It was the outcome of an entire generation, and many generations prepared it. Long before the fifteenth century the new tendencies were making themselves felt in all the domains of art and intellect. S. Francis of Assisi, Dante, Giotto, Giovanni Pisano were innovators who were the first to break the ancient moulds in which the thought of the Middle Ages had been cabined and confined. In architecture, Brunellesco was the first to free himself and begin the reformation ; the Pitti Palace and the cupola of Santa Maria dei Fiori were rising in Florence when in France men were still building Gothic cathedrals and private houses like that of Jacques Cœur. But it was with L. B. Alberti, a theorist rather than an architect, that the Renaissance first became conscious of itself and deliberately broke with the tradition of the Middle Ages. He completed the movement and ensured its triumph by fixing the laws which were to govern it. No more pointed arches, dim vaults and darkness ! Life and light were to be its aims ; hence wide bays and large porticoes through which the sunshine could enter, and simple logical structures, suitable to the climate and to the needs of the times.

The Roman column took the place of the Gothic pillar and the Classic Orders were reproduced with a just sense of their proportions ; thus for the façade of San Francesco, Alberti found his inspiration directly and very ingeniously in the Arch of Augustus which he had before his eyes. Such were the new rules. The architects of the Renaissance had only to apply them, taking the temple at Rimini for their model.

Alberti's skill is no less happily applied in the interior ; he overlaid the brick of the Franciscan walls with marble, stucco and gilding. He called upon the tender and sensual Agostino di Duccio to scatter smiling images

everywhere, even on the tombs, and to write the love-poem in honour of Isotta. Unfortunately the decoration was not left entirely to Duccio ; many coarse and clumsy details betray the hands of other artisans, notably the somewhat heavy hand of Ciuffagni.

But the daylight is fading, and as I must leave to-morrow, I want to finish my pilgrimage and explore the last section of the Via Emilia, which passes through Rimini. It enters the town after crossing the Marecchia (the Ariminus of the ancients) on a fine travertine bridge begun by Augustus and finished under Tiberius. Its five massive arches, the piers of which are slightly oblique in order to lessen the impact of the current, has resisted the onslaughts of the torrent for twenty centuries. This Marecchia, which to-day I could easily jump across, is often a tremendous river which breaks down its dykes, tears up the trees on its banks, and throws them against the pillars of the bridge, which it sometimes submerges. The Roman cement has so far held good in spite of its fury.

The Via Emilia traverses Rimini under the name of the Corso d'Augusto. It skirts the Piazza Cavour, where there is an old fountain which dates, they say, from the time of Antoninus Pius, then the Piazza di Giulio Cesare, the ancient forum of the city, and ends at the triumphal arch which the Senate and the people erected in honour of Augustus, in the year 27 B.C. It is one of the imperial monuments with which both time and man have dealt tenderly. Built entirely of travertine, it is very simple in effect, at once graceful and majestic. Two pilasters, in which fine Corinthian columns are imbedded, support an audacious arch some twenty-seven feet in span. It is decorated with two ox-heads, the emblem of the Roman colonies, and with four medallions representing Jupiter, Venus, Neptune

and Mars, the protectors of the city. A quadriga with a chariot in which Augustus was seated crowned it originally, but this was destroyed during the struggle with the Goths and replaced eventually by the present disfiguring battlements. Each of the pillars adjoins the ramparts of the town, of which it was long the principal gate, the *Porta Aurea*, as it was called because of the inscription in letters of gilded bronze. On the other side of the arch the *Via Flaminia* begins, the road that led to Rome through the country of the Senones, Umbria, and the Sabine land, and entered the Eternal City after crossing the Tiber by the *Milvius* bridge.

So I have come to the end of my road! To-morrow I shall return to Venice, faithful to my annual rendezvous, the marriage of Autumn and the Adriatic. The journey which seemed such a long one in perspective has passed so quickly that one seems to have been watching a cinema show. In a few days I shall recross the Alps, my heart full of that sorrow in quitting Italy which depressed even Madame de Staël, and repeating in my turn the verse that rose to her lips as she mounted the winding road of Mont Cenis:

*Vegno di loco ove tornar desio.*<sup>1</sup>

I had only visited Rimini once before, a few years ago while waiting for a train, to see Alberti's temple which I had long wished to know. I was going towards Umbria and I remember a lovely twilight on the Adriatic, and a nocturnal arrival at Ancona. I can even fix the date; it was in August, 1905, the day of an eclipse of the sun. I see myself again on the little square of San Francesco, reassuring a group of old women who trembled and lamented as the light was gradually extinguished. Five years already! But what are

<sup>1</sup> I come from the spot whither I would fain return.





ARCH OF AUGUSTUS, RIMINI.



five miserable years on this road, before this arch of Augustus, under which twenty centuries have passed ? Yet they count as something to us as long as, in Dante's beautiful phrase, we are still among the living of this life, which is but a race to death :

. . . vivi

Del viver ch'è' un correre alla morte.

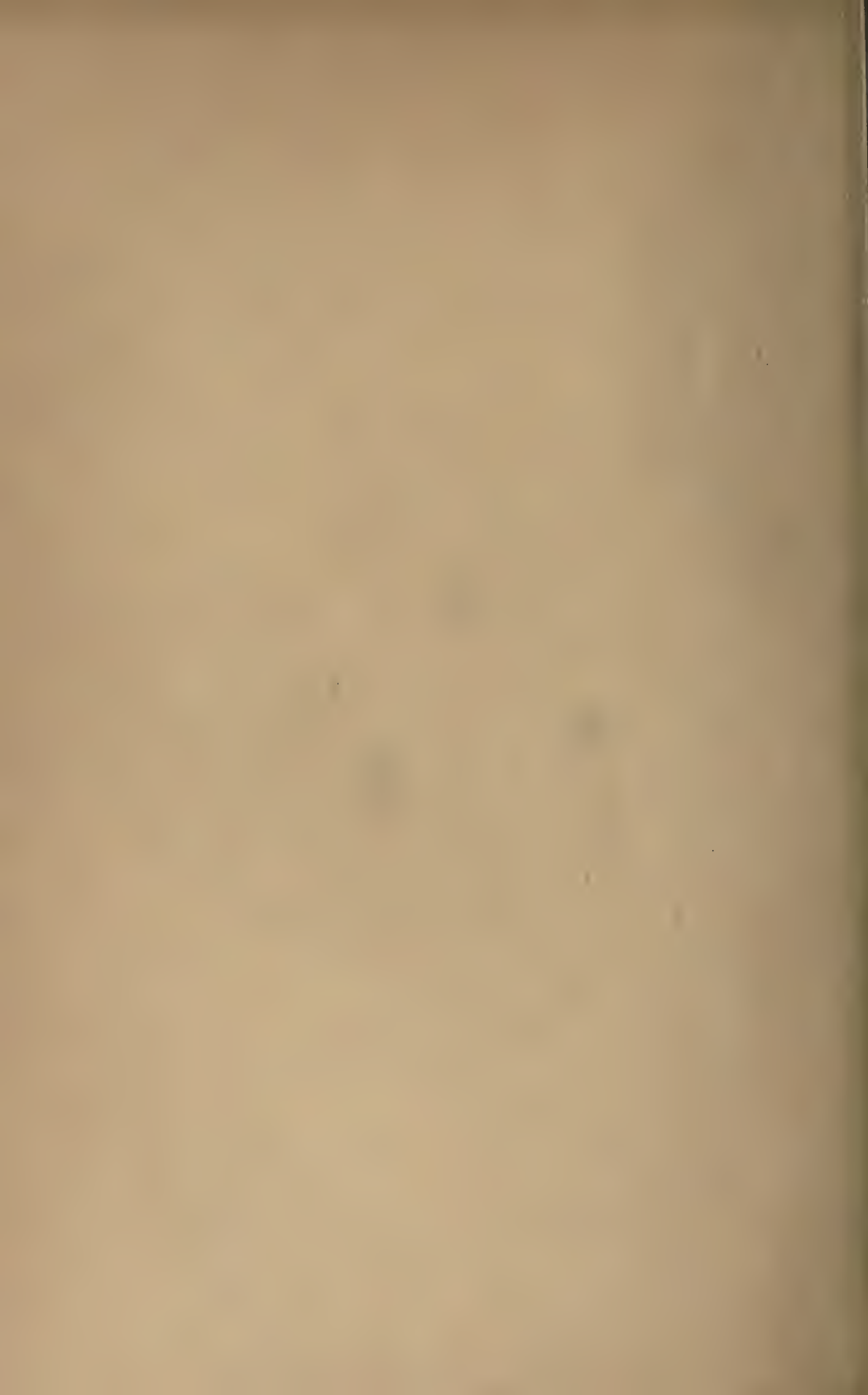
How swiftly the days pass on this Italian soil where all is joy and delight, especially when real youth is over, and we begin to look back. Just now I read again on Isotta's tomb the wise warning : *Tempus loquendi, tempus tacendi* (a time to speak and a time to keep silence). A day will come, is perhaps very near, when one can only be silent.

Before night falls I want to see the Adriatic which has so often cradled my hopes and dreams. The fishing boats are returning two by two, like pairs of lovers, folding their shining sails. They disappear behind the mole, on which a light is kindled. The calm is so intense that we can almost hear our hearts beat. There is no sound but the almost imperceptible ripple of the waves on the soft sand. And now, unnoticed, night is upon us. One by one the moon, the planets, the stars light their lamps, all those luminaries of which we know nothing in our tall houses with their blinding lights, but which, when we are travelling seem to live with us and follow us amicably. A few lights quiver on the bank. The sharp tinkle of a piano comes from the big hotel, already almost deserted. A last boat returns to port, slipping silently over the water, like a cat on velvet paws. Ah ! September evening, sweet and mournful. . . .





PART III  
THE MARCHES. UMBRIA





## CHAPTER I

### PERUGIA

RETURNING and revisiting are often more delightful than discovery. The traveller who finds himself once more in a beloved city experiences the same pleasure as he who reads anew a fine book, noting on every page fresh grounds for love and admiration. There is nothing more fascinating than to halt from time to time in familiar places where one can wander at will, without having to consult a map or to follow the directions of a guide. In museums and churches, at the corner of a square or of a street, you know what work of art is your bourn, a bourn to which you make your way in joyous confidence, sure of a friendly reception. Whereas, when you arrive in a town for the first time, you are eager to see everything, to examine each masterpiece, to place it in its century and its school; and this incessant mental labour is very exhausting, especially for a poor novelist taking a holiday, who, to quote Bourget, is neither an art-critic nor an archaeologist. But need he regret this? He is, perhaps, in better case for the appreciation of beautiful things, and the reception of the deep or violent emotions they communicate, than he who is encumbered by too heavy a weight of erudition.

A year ago, when I arrived at Perugia, I felt as if I were entering an unknown city so great was the move-

ment and agitation in the streets. M. Schneider, in his delightful book on Umbria, exaggerates a little perhaps, when he tells us that the city has remained "in almost Arcadian solitude," and is as "unfamiliar as it is beautiful." Nevertheless, my memories of Perugia were memories of a quiet town, dozing in the shelter of its ancient walls, and I found a lively, feverish and crowded city. By a curious coincidence the jubilee festival of the famous Madonna della Grazia—and an Italian festival entails concerts, illuminations and fireworks—was taking place at the same time as the Modugno lawsuit, which was convulsing Italy. I arrived on the very day when one of the leaders of the defence, the famous barrister Bianchi, had been murdered, though his violent death had no relation whatever to the case in which he was engaged. I had stepped into the very centre of the tragedy. In spite of the strong emotions which were agitating the crowd, I was struck by its dignity and reticence. The Umbrian, like his neighbour the Tuscan, is very anxious not to appear ridiculous; thoughtful and serious, he is less heavy than the Lombard, but less exuberant than the Roman or the Neapolitan. The women, too, are graceful and elegantly dressed; in olden days this was made a reproach to them; perhaps it was by no mere chance that the mirror of the University Museum, the finest mirror of Romano-Etruscan art that has come down to us, was found at Perugia. The race is closely akin to the Florentine type, but of sterner stuff. Umbria has had too much of war and violence in her past to have escaped from all traces thereof. The history of Florence is almost pacific compared with that of Perugia, which, for over two hundred years, was a fortress rather than a city, and had more towers than houses. *Perugia turrita*, towered Perugia it was called. Its griffin

with threatening beak, outspread wings, claws unsheathed and ready to tear, was a truthful symbol ; the she-wolves of Rome and Siena, the lions of Venice and the Guelfs, the neighing stallion of Arezzo are less bellicose. Etruscan or Roman, feudal or democratic, under the yoke of Pope or tyrant, Perugia was always at war. In the Middle Ages more especially, ground between Rome and the Empire, and rent by internecine quarrels, it never laid aside its arms. In the little streets of the town, narrow and tortuous as passages, cut-throat alleys where everything is eloquent of attack and defence, between the old palaces with grated windows, on the ancient pavements, undisturbed since the centuries when they were so often stained with blood, we cannot but think of that terrible Baglioni family, of which it was said that their children were born with a sword at their sides, and whose members without exception died a violent death. One day the boyish Simonetto had to defend himself single-handed against a bevy of enemies. If the youthful Raphael was not present at the scene, he often witnessed similar exploits, and there can be no doubt that they inspired the two pictures in the Louvre, the spirited *St. George* and *St. Raphael*, which he painted for his native town during his sojourn at Perugia. What tragic scenes were witnessed by the Municipio, that frowning mass of masonry which is only enlivened by apertures, colonnades and pointed bays, at a height where attack was not to be feared. The very churches were stern and bellicose, like that strange Sant' Ercolane, with its bristling battlemented walls, where the many masses that have been said have proved powerless to efface the stains of blood. One morning before a ceremony when no water was obtainable, the walls of the church had to be washed down with wine.



It is indeed one of the most curious phenomena of the history of Italy, this perpetual mixture of barbarism and religion which characterised the dawn of the Renaissance. Sigismondo Pandolfo, Captain of the Holy Church, commissioned L. B. Alberti to enshrine the temple of Rimini in marble in honour of his fourth wife, after having repudiated his first, poisoned his second, and strangled his third. But nowhere was the antithesis more startling than here, in the small towns that lived on pillage and murder, where war was waged between city and city, quarter and quarter, family and family, and yet where the delicate art of the Umbrian School and the holy works of Franciscan piety sprang up like flowers between the blood-stained flagstones. St. Francis himself, a soldier in his youth, is the living type of that martial and mystical Umbria where oak and olive alternate on the hill-sides.

Italian devotion is, indeed, entirely formal and external. At a High Mass celebrated by the Cardinal of Ferrara, who presided over the jubilee festivities that year, I saw people coming into the church as into a theatre, and going from one altar to another, loudly admiring the decoration and illumination of the church. The women were walking about fan in hand, pausing for a moment to take part in the service, genuflect and make the sign of the Cross, and then continuing their promenade, chatting with the friends they encountered, and admiring the Madonna della Grazia, illuminated by limelight at the top of the nave like the "star" in a ballet.

To-day the Cathedral is deserted. The sacristan, seeing a stranger, hurries to me and proposes to show me the works of art of his church, especially Baroccio's *Descent from the Cross*; but I make off while he is drawing up the curtain that conceals it. Why should I look

again at that vociferous canvas, a work entirely lacking in feeling, and impressive only as the sight of an epileptic seizure is impressive? How much more poignant in its harsh simplicity is Luca Signorelli's *Madonna with Four Saints*! At the time when he painted this picture no artist, not even Mantegna himself, had a more profound knowledge of anatomy. What sobriety, what gravity of arrangement, what severe and somewhat bitter power! It is well to come and look at this work after studying the Peruginos in the Pinacoteca; quitting the cold and artificial world in which the imagination of the master of Perugia delighted, we shall the better appreciate life and reality.

On leaving the Cathedral I enter the labyrinth of little streets which intersect each other in every direction, ascending, descending, terminating in a flight of steps, or on a terrace above which we see the rippling silver of olive groves and the gentle undulations of hills covered with houses. The tiny squares overhanging the ravines that separate the various suburbs of the town, such as the Piazza di Porta Sole or the Piazza delle Prome, are full of fascination. The soul of the past hovers over them, emerges from the ancient houses, and wanders round the silent gardens that slumber in the shade of the walls, showing only the funereal distaffs of their tall cypresses. Branches of willow and Virginian creeper climb up the iron gates, and hang, pensive and weary, from the rusty bars, as if they remembered. Mosses sprout between the stones of the walls, sometimes so thickly that they pad the houses as it were, and deaden vibration. Blocks of freestone fallen from ruined gateways, roofs overgrown with grass, all have the resigned but haughty air of the things of a bygone age which await death without protest, knowing that nothing can make them live

again. Yet here and there an open window, a figure seen at the end of a dark passage, a shop, a stall, a housefront with oleander blossoms remind us that daily life goes on, that creatures are born and struggle and die, that lovers embrace and suffer, here as elsewhere.

The pride of Perugia is the Giardino di Fronte, a terrace clinging to the mountain, which overhangs the valley like the prow of a ship on the waves. Nearly all the cities of Tuscany and Umbria have these admirably situated terraces commanding the plain, designed rather for the delight of the eye than for the exigencies of attack and defence. The Italians provided themselves with free spectacles of infinite variety. They were familiar with all the magic of light, the freshness of morning, the splendours of noon, the violence or the sweetness of twilight. Even so far from Greece as this, we can understand the farewells of antique heroes to life. Under a sky less intensely blue but as pure as that of Athens, the most mournful of all thoughts must be the reflection that we shall never behold the light of day again. When the people of the North shrink from death, they dwell on annihilation, the disappearance of their moral and intellectual personality ; those of the South regret the joy of living and breathing in the sunshine, the delight of loving and admiring which they will know no more.

My favourite time for dreaming in this garden is the twilight, when the sky is turning a milky blue, the soft shade of Parma violets. The Umbrian valley thrusts itself between the double chain of the Apennines and the hills that dominate the Tiber. The mountains draw together and form one of those vague backgrounds beloved of Leonardo. The towns in the distance are blurred by the light mist which rises from the overheated soil. Yet one can still distinguish the



windings of the river, the roofs of the Portiuncula and Bastia, and white Assisi on the flank of the Subasio. So familiar is the panorama to me that I can even place Spello, Foligno in the plain, Montefalco on the summit of its peak, and behind the hill of Bettona, the Rocca of Spoleto and its wood of ilexes.

The approach of evening enhances the spirituality of this spot which Dante called "the garden of the Peninsula," and Renan "the Galilee of Italy." I can recall no other landscape so full at once of sweetness and majesty. Before this valley where so many civilisations have followed one upon the other, where so many centuries of history have left their mark, where religion and art found their purest expression, all sensation seems to become more vivid, all thought more lofty. Every little town in the plain or on the hills suggests glorious names and famous works. Setting aside Perugia, where a great school arose and flourished, where the Pisani and Angelico worked, where Perugino developed and Raphael studied, we have Assisi with Cimabue and Giotto, Spello and its Pintoricchios, Trevi and its Spagnas, Spoleto and its Filippo Lippis, Montefalco and its Gozzolis. The eye wanders from the ancient Tiber to sacred Clitumnus, from the Topino sung by Dante to the roofs of the Portiuncula, from the hills of Trasymene to the walls of Spoleto where Lucrezia Borgia reigned. From this very belvedere, the Perugians saw the Etruscan cohorts and the legions of Flaminius, the crowds which flocked to S. Francis, the armies of the Pope and the soldiers of Napoleon. One might grave on the gates of Perugia, with a slight modification, an inscription akin to that at the entrance to Siena: *Cor magis Perugia pandit*. Perugia opens the heart more widely.

When I arrived a few tourists were seated on the stone

benches, Baedeker in hand, trying to recognise the various towns below or to follow the course of the Tiber which disappears among trees and meadows. But as evening fell, they departed. Only an old man remained, walking to and fro and leading an idiot child who babbled incoherently.

Gradually darkness crept over the landscape. The hills drew together and formed a closer circle round the plain, throwing their shadow over the valleys. A cracked bell rang shrilly from the tower of San Pietro, seeming in Dante's mournful words to lament the dying day. The tramontana began to blow, sharp and cold. I returned hurriedly by the deserted Corso Cavour, pursued by the doleful voice of the little idiot.

## CHAPTER II

### UMBRIAN ART

BEFORE entering the Museum, I had a fancy to see once more the Fonte Maggiore, one of the most beautiful fountains in Italy, which has so many. It is supremely elegant with its three superposed basins and its double row of bas-reliefs. One of these bears a pompous inscription still decipherable, in which the names of Niccolò and Giovanni Pisano are coupled for the first time. The father was nearing the end of his illustrious career; the son was beginning his. The dawn of the fourteenth century was already breaking. Abandoning ancient formulas, Art was turning to Nature, and no

longer confining itself to the expression of religious sentiment. This revolution was initiated by sculpture under the dual influence of the antique statues, casts of which Niccolò had seen in Southern Italy, and of the new French art. When and how did the Pisani study the admirable sculpture of the French cathedrals? I must leave the question to historians, but it is certain that as early as the middle of the thirteenth century, Gothic art was familiar to them. The pulpits of the Baptistery of Pisa and the Cathedral of Siena bear witness to this, as also certain details of the Fonte Maggiore. The figure representing *Dialectics*, for instance, is dressed in the French manner, and *Music*, instead of holding the traditional lyre, is striking little bells, as on the capital in the Cathedral of Chartres where she is represented above Pythagoras.

But there was another influence at the root of this artistic revival: the Franciscan movement. Thode went too far, perhaps, in maintaining that the Renaissance was the outcome of this movement, and Renan too exaggerated when he declared that "the sordid beggar of Assisi was the father of Italian art"; but there is no doubt that S. Francis did more to hasten the dawn of the new era than any of his contemporaries. His life, instinct with love and humility, pity and charity, the legend of the Portiuncula mingling at every turn with the life of the people, the history of the popular order of the Fratelli, all spoke directly to the sensibility of artists who did their best to translate the tender or pathetic impressions they received. It is a mistake to couple the name of S. Dominic with that of S. Francis in connection with the Italian Renaissance, as some have done. True, the violent apostle of Calahorra and the preaching friars who carried his doctrines throughout the world, also used art as a means of education and



propaganda ; but they did not inspire artists directly. They merely demanded from them vast symbolical compositions to serve as moralising influences among the masses, synthetic works in harmony with their cold, dogmatic spirit. A sure proof that they had no part in the artistic revival is the fact that there are hardly any portraits of S. Dominic and his disciples, whereas those of the Poverello may be counted by thousands. He may be recognised in the mosaics of San Giovanni Laterano and Santa Maria Maggiore, in the old frescoes of Giunta and Berlinghieri, and in one of the sculptures of Orvieto. In the cupola of the Baptistery of Parma, the scene of the stigmata forms a pendant to the vision of Ezekiel. Last year at Siena I was struck by the numerous representations of S. Francis in the Istituto delle Belle Arti ; the first picture one sees on entering, attributed to Margheritone of Arezzo, the next two, described in the Catalogue as "in the Greek manner," and over forty others in the gallery all depict him opening his coarse woollen gown to show in his side the mark of the spear.

In order to illustrate the Franciscan poem, artists, in default of tradition, were driven to direct observation of life. Heretofore, they may be said to have expressed but a single sentiment, one common to all Christianity : the awe of man in the presence of Deity. In the earliest paintings that have come down to us, God is a fierce and threatening master, inaccessible to the faithful. The Madonna is always the Byzantine Virgin, impassible and rigid ; in the Crucifixion scene, she weeps, standing upright. The persons round the cross, stiff and motionless, have very large heads, and vacant, lifeless eyes, after the *vecchia maniera greca goffa e sproporzionata* (the old Greek manner, clumsy and disproportionate) of which Vasari speaks. We feel that the painter was

oppressed by the religious terror which overhung the whole of the Middle Ages. When the sun of Assisi had illumined the Italian sky, Art, bursting open its leaden coffin, sprang upwards towards the light. The old Christian drama was rejuvenated and humanised ; it learned love and pity. The ancient moulds gave way under the pressure of the new castings. Artists abandoned their painfully acquired formulas to seek inspiration and models in their own surroundings ; their personages were real and living like themselves, like those S. Francis had shown them in his stories. Christ became once more the Son of Man ; they represented Him crowned with thorns, His eyes closed, His head bowed, His body drooping and bleeding, as in the fine wooden crucifix of the Pinacoteca which Perugino fastened to one of his works. Jesus was no longer the Christ of glory and majesty, but the suffering Saviour who died for the sins of the world. The hieratic Madonna was humanised ; she bent maternally over her Babe, or pressed Him to her bosom. The episode preferred above all others was the most human of all, the scene the Italians called a *Pietà*, the Virgin with the dead body of her Son across her knees. And painters and sculptors began to look at Nature, to seek inspiration around them, paraphrasing the *Hymn of created Things*. Trees, fruit, garlands of vine, and landscape were introduced. Thus on the Fonte Maggiore, in spite of its dilapidation and the railing which prevents us from examining it closely, we recognise rustic scenes, the works of the successive months, the vintage, hunting and fishing, animals, no longer terrible and grimacing, but natural and lively, a lamb, a wolf, a dog, birds, a falcon, all those the saint had loved and with which he had talked so often. The month of April is typified by a woman holding a cornucopia and a basket of

roses ; does she not herald the advent of the Renaissance, like Botticelli's *Spring*, crowned with leaves and scattering flowers ?

But let us enter the Municipio. The Pinacoteca is almost empty . . . Boccati, Bonfigli, Fiorenzo : how I love your works, those ardent and vivid acts of faith ! Your colour, lucid and transparent, aptly translates the purity of your hearts ; its limpid fluidity seems almost immaterial. Your tints are red as the flame of your love, or blue as the immaculate azure of your skies in which shone the most radiant light that had beamed upon the world since the Star of Bethlehem. I regret, of course, that your pictures are no longer in the churches for which you painted them. But here, at least, you have been spared incongruous surroundings, and your gentle Virgins, moved by the appearance of the Annunciation Angel, are not jostled by bathing nymphs, or voluptuous Ledas. You did not look upon the sacred legends as agreeable anecdotes which lent themselves readily to illustration. Your Christianity is sincere, not false and theatrical as it too soon became among your neighbours in Florence, Rome and Bologna. You sought to serve religion by your art ; later, it was religion which was made to minister to art. And I love you also because you have been misunderstood. Even nowadays, the critics are severe, when, indeed, they notice you at all. They mention you grudgingly, in the interests of completeness. One of them, speaking of Bonfigli of late, merely notes in passing " the mediocre efforts of a painter of insipid angels crowned with chaplets of roses." Others, because you were pious, artless, and sincere, class you as mystics obstinately opposed to the realistic movement, and explain this by the fact that you lived in the neighbourhood of S. Francis ; they fail to see that it is hardly logical to make the same man



responsible for Giotto's naturalistic revolution and the alleged reaction of the Perugian painters.

But, in fact, even in the old Boccatti there is a curious striving after truth. What could be less mystical than the frieze of archers and horsemen, or the Child playing with a hare? The flowery portico behind the Virgin is like those affected by Mantegna, and the variety of the musical instruments in the concert of angels shows an evident desire for reality. These naturalistic tendencies become more pronounced in Bonfigli. His *naïvetés* are not always due to awkwardness and inexperience; they are often deliberate and aim at dramatic effect. Is not the gesture of the friar who covers his face with his hand to hide his tears, in the *Burial of S. Ludovic*, a very touching one? What a sense of movement and picturesqueness there is in the *Banner of S. Bernardino*! How vividly the painter has depicted the strange scene of the fanatical crowd burning all objects of vanity and luxury, books and jewels, at the bidding of the saint! The background of the picture is an exact representation of the façade of San Bernardino, which had just been completed; the majority of the figures are portraits. The work of Fiorenzo di Lorenzo is still more devoid of mysticism; and what was very remarkable at the period, the artist preferred to paint external life rather than pious episodes. Grace and movement are his chief preoccupations, and he is more akin to Ghirlandajo and even to Verrocchio than to Perugino. The modelling of faces and bodies, the colour of stuffs, the animation of scenes, are all carried to a high degree of perfection in each of those small panels intended for the door of a sacristy, which are among the most fascinating works I know. Everything in them is lively, nervous and intelligent. What lightness, what almost feline flexibility in the young

warriors ! What grace and fancy in the landscape backgrounds and the architecture, what richness and variety in the begemmed and embroidered garments which recall Crivelli's sumptuous draperies !

Such were the tendencies of that School of Perugia which we must not call *Umbrian*, for this over-comprehensive term does not distinguish between these painters and other artists, who, though born in Umbria, attached themselves either to Siena or Florence. The confused and sometimes contradictory views put forward in this connection are due in the main to a desire to classify all painters born or having worked in Umbria, as of one single school. I think, on the contrary, that if we wish to understand these artists, we must divide them into three groups.

There are first the painters of the Southern group, which I may perhaps be allowed to call the School of Foligno, because its two chief representatives, Gentile da Fabriano and Niccolò Alunno, were born in that town. Both were very strongly influenced by Siena, and later, by Benozzo Gozzoli when he was working in the district, that is to say, at a time when he was still deeply imbued with the ideas of his master, Fra Angelico. They were artists of austere and passionate piety, stubbornly faithful to the old traditions, and entirely untouched by the emancipating movement which was spreading outward from Tuscany.

At the other end of Umbria, in the part nearer to Florence, the new tendencies manifested themselves very rapidly. Piero della Francesca, Melozzo da Forlì, and Luca Signorelli of Cortona are admirable painters, bold and original, men who have nothing in common with the Sienese idealists.

The true Umbrian School is in reality that of Perugia, which was born and developed under the double influence

of Florence and Siena. The religious ideal persisted here in all its purity, but artists sought to express it in a truer, more real, and more vital manner. Boccati, Bonfigli and Fiorenzo di Lorenzo are its representative painters. Perugino unfortunately arrested the realistic movement in its infancy. More gifted than the others, and more skilled in the technique of oil-painting, he obtained the greatest success with sentimental, mystical works in which material perfection was carried to its highest point. The love of money, to which he sacrificed everything, induced him to repeat them incessantly. There is no more lamentable instance of a master who debased his art. His studio became a devotional picture-shop. Tuscany and Umbria were inundated with his commercial productions, works of facile technique, executed from memory according to formulas dear to the public. When Perugino did something more than repeat himself—either in works in which he took some pride, or in portraits like those of the Cambio and the sacristy of San Pietro—he was really a great painter. Was he a believer at first, or was he always a sceptic? The question, which has often been discussed, is of little moment. It is, however, interesting to note that the same man who inscribed the first words of one of Savonarola's sermons beneath his own portrait died after refusing to make his confession, a most audacious act in those days.

I am inclined to think that he was always an unbeliever. He painted religious scenes because the artist of those times rarely painted anything else. And as he could neither animate an action nor reproduce movement he confined his attention to faces, the colour of draperies, and landscape. If he had been a man of strong sensibility, if he had lost his faith during some crisis, we should note a change, a transition. If he had been



really sincere at first, something would have betrayed him later. Now his works are always characterised by the same coldness, the same ecstatic expression, devotional rather than pious. His persons have never lived and suffered; their impassive faces are marked by an eternal indifference; they seem, to quote Taine, to have had their intellectual growth arrested in childhood by a conventual education. They never look at anything. They have no part in the scenes at which they are present. The symmetry of their attitudes and of the landscape enhances their insipidity. In an *Adoration of the Shepherds* the setting consists of four wooden pillars surmounted by a little triangular roof, about the most stupid framework ever devised by a painter. Individually, the figures, the draperies and the perspectives are beautiful, but the general effect is cold and undeniably tedious. Perugino's faults are more especially prominent in galleries where his works are hung among those of other artists as in the Pinacoteca, where Fiorenzo di Lorenzo's *Adoration of the Magi* confronts his *Coronation of the Virgin*. Perugino's work is as frigid and inert as that of Fiorenzo is warm and vital. There is nothing mystical about the Fiorenzo, the true and animated figures of which all play their part in the action; those of the Perugino, on the other hand, are motionless, false in expression and attitude; their diminutive hands and faces are out of harmony with their elongated figures.

By bringing the School of Perugia to the apogee of its renown, Perugino killed its glory. Local artists—who were very numerous, if we may judge by the long list of works catalogued under the heading, "School of Perugino"—confined themselves to the imitation of him who had so sedulously imitated himself. Among these were some who might have become great

painters, had they escaped his depressing influence: Giovanni di Pietro, for instance, called *Lo Spagna*, fine examples of whom are preserved at Spoleto, Assisi and Perugia, and Giannicola Manni, an artist who should be better known, and who does not appear to very great disadvantage beside Perugino in the *Cambio*. I admire his grace and facility. Fortunate Pintoricchio, who was summoned to Rome, and still more fortunate Raphael, who was to breathe the free air of Tuscany! In the fresco by the latter in San Severo, there is already a more vital power. The worship of beauty was about to be born again on the old pagan soil. Very soon sensuality was to break through the veil of religion. The Virgins were to become merely young women with rich, supple carnations. Raphael at Perugia, on his return from his first journey to Florence, seems to me the embodiment of this dramatic moment in the history of human sensibility, when the pious dream of the Middle Ages faded before renascent paganism.

### CHAPTER III

#### ASSISI

Intra Tupino et l'acqua che discende  
Del colle eletto del Beato Ubaldo  
Fertile costa d'alto monte pende . . . <sup>1</sup>

THIS fertile slope which lies at the foot of Monte Subasio, between the Chiascio and the Topino, is the

<sup>1</sup> Between Tupino and the water that descends from the height chosen by the Blessed Ubaldo hangs the fertile slope of the lofty mountain.

hillside of Assisi ; I see it covered with vines and olives from the carriage which is taking me down towards the Tiber, to the leisurely trot of a pair of horses who seem already tired as we start. The morning is fresh and luminous. There was rain in the night, and through the clarified atmosphere everything is so sharply defined that I think of the *lumine acute* spoken of by Dante. A single shower has sufficed to bring *Umbria verde* to life again as by magic. Drops of water still shine on the light foliage of the olives, whose doleful trunks look blacker and more tragic than ever after their bath of rain. They are, indeed, the most melancholy of trees, meet witnesses of the Saviour's Passion. Those which clothe the slopes of the hills are some of the most venerable in Italy. They are so old that they must have been centenarians in the time of S. Francis. Torn and ravaged as if by internal suffering, cracked and hollow, they bear the imprint of their struggles to push aside the rock and find the scanty soil. Sometimes nothing but the bark is left of the trunk, and we wonder how the sap can still rise. Cold, heat, rain and wind have tortured them for centuries, like the lost souls which moan from the darkest pages of the *Inferno*. Like serpents intertwined in deadly combat, like twisted, knotted cables, like muscles rigid in their incessant defensive readiness all the aspects of the tree beloved of Pallas seem here to symbolise war rather than peace. But by a curious contrast, the most delicate foliage veils the rugged trunks, and there is no more charming sight than the shimmer of the little leaves, glinting in the sun like silver scales.

At the foot of the slope, nature changes and becomes smiling. We see very few olive-trees now. The landscape is like a huge garden. Mulberry-trees, vineyards, corn and maize share the fields of this plain which was



once the bed of Lake Topino. On the slight undulations there are a few groups of massive ilexes, and here and there a poplar, or a cypress, less vigorous, but concentrating all their sap on a single point to spring heavenwards. The houses are embowered in orchards and pergolas. Heaps of tomatoes drying in the sun make large red splashes. It seems as if life must be easy here, and the horizon itself, bounded on every side by a line of harmonious hills, attunes the soul to peace. A light breeze is blowing and its murmur is soft as that of the wind among the reeds of Thrasymane. An impression of strength and health rises from the rich earth. Umbria is at once more joyous and harsher than Tuscany; it realises more fully the *soave austero*. We are easily duped by words, by that *piperie* against which Montaigne warns us, and very often we find in things the appearance we desire beforehand to see in them; but “gentle Umbria” is really no mere conventional phrase, especially if we take the word in its widest and strongest sense. Umbria is “gentle” because it is peaceful, because its rhythms are quiet and equable, because the admiration it inspires is without terror, because it is truly human. I understand why the joy of life held a larger place in the religion of S. Francis than the fear of death.

If at Perugia it is possible to forget the Poverello, here in this valley on which his eyes first opened and finally closed in death, along this road studded with little altars to the Virgin, it is out of the question. Each corner suggests an episode of his wonderful life or witnessed one of his miracles. His name is ubiquitous. We walk on the very roads he trod, and they have hardly changed. Here is the Ponte San Giovanni, the old saddle-back bridge across the Tiber; although it is nearly dried up, the sight of the stream stirs the blood; the waters are mysterious mirrors which keep some vibration

of the things they have reflected. Over this bridge S. Francis passed every time he went from Assisi to Perugia, and on that evening when he was led away a prisoner by the triumphant Perugians. The same meadows, the same trees saw him, and also the same gentle, amiable inhabitants, to whom he talked of his dreams and his beliefs. I imagine him on summer mornings sallying forth from the Portiuncula, going to meet the peasants, chatting with them and helping them in their work. Then at close of day, after sharing a meal at a farm, speaking to them of the glories of Nature, under the tranquil splendour of the starlit heavens.

The love of Nature has become a commonplace. There is hardly anyone in these days who does not admire—more or less sincerely—a sunrise, or a sunset, the sparkling sea, a flowery meadow, a russet wood in autumn. In the poems and novels of recent years more pages have been inspired by the beauty of landscapes than by analysis of the human heart. And many writers might repeat with the poetess of *Cœur innombrable*:

La forêt, les étangs et les plaines fécondes  
Ont plus touché mes yeux que les regards humains.<sup>1</sup>

But in mediæval Italian literature, it is rare to find a few lines devoted to a natural spectacle. Picturesque details are conspicuously absent. We must make a reservation in the cases of Dante, Petrarch, and, in the following century, that Sylvius Æneas Piccolomini who, when he became Pope, loved to hold a consistory on the verge of a meadow, in the shade of venerable trees, and whose descriptions of Todi, Nemi and Siena seem almost modern. The Umbrian plain, now so

<sup>1</sup> Forests, pools and fertile plains have said more to my eyes than human looks.

famous and so belauded, did not inspire the writers of bygone ages who beheld it. Montaigne devotes but a few lines to it, when, on the road to Ancona he halted at Foligno, without deigning to ascend to Assisi. President de Brosses did not leave his coach, and admired the famous landscape through the window "taking good care," as he says, "not to go to Assisi, for he feared stigmata like all devils." Goethe merely noted a temple of Minerva in the town of S. Francis, and Stendhal himself says nothing of the road by which he travelled returning from Rome to Perugia: on the journey thither, he did not enter Umbria at all, and he was content with an absent-minded survey by moonlight of the remains of "those cities of ancient Etruria, always perched on the top of some mountain"; the only sentiment they seem to have evoked in him was indignation with the Romans, "who, by no better title than that of a brutal courage, came to trouble the peace of those republics which were so greatly their superiors by their fine arts, their wealth and their faculty for happiness." S. Francis, on the other hand, spent his life praising this valley, rejoicing in its light, drinking it in with his eyes, to use a popular but expressive phrase. He had been contemplating it since his childhood, the age when impressions leave such ineffaceable traces on a fresh imagination that the boy Ruskin, gazing at the plain about Croydon, exclaimed that his eyes were coming out of his head! The parents of the young Bernardone lived at Assisi, in the upper part of the town, and from his windows he could admire the landscape in all the grace of spring and all the melancholy of autumn. Its wide horizons and their undulations had no secrets for him. Even where the Chiascio disappears amongst the verdure, his practised eye could follow its sinuous course through the fields. Few



rural scenes are more steeped in poetry than this valley between Perugia and Foligno. How mournful must the Poverello's sensations have been, when, on returning from his journey to Egypt, eager to see his native land, he halted in the Venetian lagoon under the funereal yews of the little desolate island which has been sacred to him ever since. How gladly he must have turned away from the dismal scene, where everything spoke of sorrow and death ! How he must have evoked the smiling hills of Assisi shaded by their silvery olive-trees ! And, how joyfully they must have welcomed their loving and docile son !

To the amazement of my driver, I tell him not to stop at the Church of Santa Maria degl' Angeli. The memory of this was one of the least agreeable I had carried away from the holy hill, and I was loth to revive it. True, the Portiuncula stood here, it is the cradle of the illustrious Order which was to give five Popes to Christendom ; but what remains of the primitive hut which was the scene of the idyll of S. Francis and "Madame Poverty" ? In a pamphlet I bought on a former visit, and find among my notes, I read that "the elegance of the various styles, the perfect purity of the lines, the vast space it covers, make this basilica one of the finest in the world, and on entering it, the heart swells, uplifted by its luminous amplitude." But I remember sadly the miserable little chapel in the huge new church, Overbeck's heavy fresco, and the very modern garden of thornless roses from which the monks—for a consideration—will pluck you a few speckled leaves. Gentle Poverello, who would once fain have pulled down the walls covered with tiles which your companions had substituted in your absence for the original thatched huts, what would you think of the cold and sumptuous dwelling which the people of this

century have built for you ? Vainly would you seek the roof of the humble cell on which, the evening that you died, the larks alighted at sunset with joyous cries, although it is their habit to sing only in the brightness of morning, *alaudæ aves lucis amicæ* (larks, those birds which love the light).

At a turn in the road, Assisi appears in all its majesty. Seen from this point, the city is formidable. It is a warrior-town, an impregnable fortress, set upon a buttress of the Subasio. It is a citadel of another kind, too, one of the most glorious of the spiritual world. At the sight of it I thrill to one of those profound emotions which once or twice in a lifetime stir the most secret fibres of our being ; when, before a work of art, we discover pure beauty ; when, under the lines of a book, the very laws of life are revealed to us ; when from some height we see, as did Ruskin on the terrace of Schaffhausen, a panorama so marvellous and magnificent that we are ready to fall on our knees.

The places where a great man lived will always move us, if they served to develop his sensibilities. Landscapes more especially appeal to our imagination, because they do not change, and we can say to ourselves : this is the horizon on which his eyes rested ; these are the plains and hills, unchanged after centuries, which enchanted him. The landscape round Assisi stirs us more deeply than its churches and its monastery. These trees, now reddened by the summer sun, these golden vine-branches hanging from the elms, these yellowing fields will all be clothed in verdure again, for ever young and new, when those massive walls have crumbled to dust.

No saint has proved so attractive to the erudite, or inspired so many learned commentaries, as he who condemned science and one day sold the only Psalter

of the Portiuncula to give bread to an old woman. I forget who it was who said somewhat maliciously that S. Francis hated books because he foresaw those which would be written about himself. No writer has felt more tenderly towards him than the author of the *Vie de Jésus*; Renan admired more especially his love of poverty, a love so strange and individual that even his disciples did not understand it, regarding mendicancy as a work of piety which conferred special graces. "Like the patriarch of Assisi," said Renan, "I have gone through the world without any serious attachments to it, and merely as a lodger, so to say. Though neither of us had anything, we both considered ourselves rich. God gave us the usufruct of the universe, and we were content to enjoy without possessing."

The charm of S. Francis and the attraction he has for minds utterly unlike his own are perhaps due to the fact that he was very little of a churchman. He is nothing of a priest, nothing of a theologian. He was not very well versed in the Bible, and quite ignorant of scholastics. He knew little about the saints, though he was to be one of the greatest of them. He was, above all, profoundly human. Having lived the life of this world, he was sensible of its sorrows and humiliations. It is with him, says one of his historians very aptly, as with the *Imitation of Christ*; "a book in which men most opposite in thought and opinion find sustenance, and which was dear to the founder of Positivism. It is not essential to believe in order to love this book, or to admire the acts and words of this Saint; it is enough to have loved and suffered." The son of Bernadone, the clothier of Assisi, had lived, loved and suffered. He might have adopted the verses the Abbé Le Cardonnel repeated to me a few years ago, on the little balcony of San Pietro which I see from here, hanging on the hillside,



the balcony on which Cardinal Pecci used to stand and dream when he was still only the Archbishop of Perugia :

Comme le voyageur qui n'a trouvé que sables  
Chercheur d'ivresse, cœur amèrement puni,  
Pour avoir trop aimé les beautés perissables  
Je sais quelle tristesse est au fond du fini.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### MONTEFALCO

ONE of the most extraordinary phenomena in the history of art is the prodigious florescence of painters who, about the period of the Renaissance, covered the walls of Italian churches, more especially those of Tuscany and Umbria, with masterpieces. Tiny chapels hidden among the mountains contain frescoes which are often remarkable, and nearly always interesting. New examples come to light daily from beneath the plaster overlaying them, and many are no doubt still sleeping beneath their white shrouds. In their stupid haste to get rid of these venerable relics, the people of the 17th and 18th centuries did not allow themselves time to destroy them, and were content to cover them over with a coat of whitewash. These barbarians thus became the involuntary preservers of the works which offended their bad taste. Would that I had leisure to go and visit some of these humble churches ! That of Rocchicciola,

<sup>1</sup> Like the traveller who has found nothing but sand, seeker of joy, heart bitterly punished, I, who have loved too fondly the things that perish, know the bitterness that lies in the depths of the end.

for instance, which is only to be reached by a rugged path, and where a few years ago, M. Broussolle had the joy of restoring a whole series of fine paintings to life. But time presses. I must leave Umbria. I have only two more days to devote to it, and these I have kept jealously for Montefalco.

The crossing of the plain of Foligno, the ascent of the peak on which the little town is perched like a falcon in its eyrie, the walk through the olive groves, the horizons that gradually expand as one mounts, the art-treasures that await the pilgrim in the Church of San Francesco, are certainly among the deepest and most exquisite of the impressions offered by this lavish Umbrian land. This is mainly because civilisation has changed scarcely anything in this spot. Montefalco has remained almost what it was in past centuries, and tourists are very rare here still. For two days I was the only stranger wandering in the deserted street; no other sacrilegious step resounded on their sharp stones.

The plain of Foligno is one of the most fertile in Italy. Even in Lombardy I have rarely seen such magnificent vines. The branches hang from tree to tree in leafy garlands, heavy with golden grapes. The vigorous stems, as thick as a man's arm sometimes, twine round the trunks of mulberry and elm; the flexible shoots of the vine dart above the rounded heads of the trees and sway lightly in the wind like festal pennons. The varying tones of green mingle with harmonious grace. In some places the vintage is ending. The vine-dressers, perched upon ladders, and half hidden among the foliage, gather the grapes that have ripened on the topmost branches, and pass them to the women, who receive them in great baskets; when these are full, they hoist them on their shoulders with a lively gesture and carry

them off, moving with elastic step and rhythmic gait. Where have I noted just such a scene? I remember: in the Campo Santo at Pisa, in the *Noah's Vintage*, so famous for the purely accessory episode of *La Vergognosa*. It must have been here that the idea of the fresco presented itself to Gozzoli: I recognise his vine-dressers, his grape-gatherers; here, near a farm, is the same arbour. And is this illusion? The landscape he painted seems to me to have been just this corner between the double line of old willows along the ditches of the road.

We meet carts drawn by great white oxen with splendid shining horns. Their eyes are pensive, gentle and sad, their hides spotless, of the milky whiteness of the old Gubbio majolicas. Suddenly my driver turns round, points with a theatrical gesture to a trickling stream, and solemnly announces: "The Clitumnus!" Then he explains that this was the sacred stream whose waters made all the animals who drank of it white. The little bridge over the river is so sharply ridged that the horses have to be whipped up into a gallop to climb it. Here again was an engineer who has not been surpassed by modern rivals! The water is absolutely limpid. We can understand the old belief. True, many other torrents of the Apennine slopes have the same transparency. But why reject the legends? They are beloved of poets. Pliny, a poet, too, at times, compares the colour of this water to that of snow. Let us not contradict either him or Byron, who declares that the nymphs never bathed in purer crystal.

After crossing a series of other little bridges over the numerous arms of the Teverone, which makes its way to the Topino, watering the fields of Bevagna on the way, the ascent begins. The horses subside into a walk; the driver gets down from the box; it will take us a



good hour. But it is such a delightful sensation to rise thus above one of the most glorious plains in the world, among silvery olives quivering under the golden sunshine, that the road seems almost too short. The pleasure is complete : joy of the soul and joy of the mind, joy, too, of our "brother the body" to use the language of S. Francis. As we ascend, peaks, hills and valleys stand out clearly. Behind the slopes the little towns appear, rising from every fold in the ground. In the hollow the valleys spread out, perfectly even ; we see that it is the ancient bed of a dried-up lake.

While they prepare me a room and a frugal meal at the hotel, I hasten to San Francesco. The custodian approaches me, grave and venerable. With a ceremonious gesture, he invites me to enter " his " church.

There is nothing more melancholy than a disused church. All death moves us ; but this death more than another, because life was once more fervid here. Nevertheless, it is well to leave these paintings in the places where the artists conceived them. Frescoes transferred to museums always remind me of those caged love-birds, which crouch in a corner, shivering under our cold skies, and looking at us pitifully.

The custodian points out Giotto's *Madonna*, the works which have been completely restored, and those which are beginning to emerge from under the whitewash. Nearly all the Umbrian painters are represented in this church, the artistic wealth of which has caused it to be transformed into a State Museum.

What freshness ! What suavity of composition and colour ! Never was the master more perfect ! And this because he was never more sincere, because he put his whole self into his work, without seeking to astonish or dazzle us. All that he knew already, all that he had learnt from Angelico, or from the frescoes of Assisi serves

to express the emotions inspired in him by the pious country which had offered the hollows of its hills as a cradle for nascent Christianity. No other horizon, no other atmosphere could have been so inspiring to a believing and artistic soul. Gozzoli lived here for two years. After the work of the morning and at eventide his eyes sought rest in contemplation of the gentle valley. From the white walls of Assisi, from the roofs of the Portiuncula where the first flowers of mysticism blossomed, from the fields of Bevagna where S. Francis preached to the birds, the aroma of the marvellous legend rose to him, a heavy, intoxicating incense. But this plain, and also the life of the Poverello, taught him to love truth and nature. What a difference there is between these frescoes and the earlier ones at which he worked under the guidance of the Monk of Fiesole ! Though his heart had remained faithful to the tender ideal of his master, his mind was enlarged. The artist had thrown off formula and approached reality. And it is this which fascinates us in him. Later, at Florence, at San Gimignano, and at Pisa, he emancipated himself still further, but at some cost to his sincerity. He was absorbed in the brilliant, gaily coloured spectacle of worldly life. His art became secular, almost pagan. A skilful stage manager, a most picturesque story-teller, he set his ingenious cavalcades upon the walls of the palace that Michelozzo Michelozzi had just built for Piero de' Medici ; but then he was no longer the moved and moving painter of Montefalco, and in spite of all his science and all his skill, he seems more remote from us than here, in this Church of San Francesco, where he was content to let his heart speak. In the execution of these frescoes he does not show that respect for elegance and high finish which were later to be his chief preoccupations. Often, indeed, he is awkward and incorrect ; but he is

loyal and truthful. There are no unusual attitudes, no elaborate essays in expression. He paints as he sees, or as he imagines. He illustrates to the best of his ability the Franciscan poem as it haunted the thoughts of a Christian of those days, with all its artlessness and all its candour. He adapted the scenes of popular life in which he took part daily to the life of the saint. The faces he gave to the actors in the legend were those he encountered in the streets of the little town. For a background he took the prospects on which his eyes rested, the Apennines, the Subasio, with its deep gorges, Spello, Bevagna, surrounded by its fat pastures, Montefalco, with its ramparts and its churches. This love of reality makes him sometimes akin to our modern painters. The grave and tranquil silhouette of the mother of Francis receiving him at the top of the staircase reminded me of Puvis de Chavannes and his *Ste. Geneviève watching over Paris*. In the *S. Francis preaching to the Birds*, the face of the Saint is so true and so expressive that we seem almost to hear the exquisite sermon: "My brothers, praise your Creator who covered you with beautiful feathers, and gave you wings to fly in the pure and spacious air." All the birds Gozzoli saw round him are gathered together; white pigeons, ducks, the linnets that sing in the bushes and the swallows that build in the walls of Montefalco. All Umbria, all the charm and all the sweetness of the valley are summed up here in the choir of this modest church, where one of the most exquisite among the painters of the 15th century glorified the purest idyll known among men since the time of Christ.



PART IV

VENETIA



## CHAPTER I

### VERONA

IF I have but an afternoon to spend in Verona, where should I spend it but in the Giusti Gardens ? Of all the fair gardens of Italy, which has so many in which I have mused and dreamed, I think this is my favourite. Others stir us more by their memories, and others again are more voluptuously situated on the banks of a lake, or by the sea ; but the grace and seduction of this pleasance are all its own.

The Italians have always loved gardens. Pliny speaks to us so often and so lovingly of his that we could almost draw a plan of them ; their decoration can have differed very little from that of to-day ; in a letter to Apollinaris, he lauds his "alleys planted with green trees, leafy and well pruned, his planes on which the ivy climbs, hanging its supple wreaths from trunk to trunk." It was not until the time of the Renaissance that the lovers of gardens were no longer content with natural beauty, and supplemented it by complicated ornament, porticoes, architectural fantasies, artificial waters and all that Barrès so aptly describes as "the art of arranging realities for the delight of the soul." However, unlike the English (and, on occasion, the French) the Italians did not attempt to imitate nature artificially ; they only sought to embellish it according to the rules of art.



At Verona even more than elsewhere, perhaps, gardens were always held in honour. From time immemorial the shores of the Brenta were covered with parks and country houses. One of the most ancient documents on the villas of the Middle Ages was written as long ago as the 14th century for the Veronese family of the Cerruti, and it was also a Veronese, Leonardo Grasso, who bore the cost of the famous *Dream of Poliphilus*, in which several flowery groves are described and engraved. This morning, too, in the Museo Civico, I noticed a fine fountain and a garden background in the *S. Catherine* by the Veronese painter, Vittore Pisanello.

A little courtyard with battlemented walls precedes the Giusti Garden ; but the walls are of pink bricks, the battlements are draped with Virginian creeper, and through the iron gates the garden smiles so invitingly that a friendly face seems to greet you on the threshold and beg you to enter.

"Nature," says De Brosses, "has treated the Giusti Palace handsomely by giving it in its very garden rocks and numbers of prodigiously tall, pointed cypresses, which make it look like one of those places where sorcerers hold their Sabbaths." The park has changed very little since the visit of the intelligent Dijonnais magistrate, to whom Verona recalled Lyons and the hill of the Fourvière. Valery, the King's Librarian at Versailles, found it in 1827 occupied by an Austrian battalion, and the only thought suggested to him by the cypress avenue—one of the most beautiful in the world—was that "its successive terraces once used for the purpose of drying cloth, recall the time when the preparation of wool was a noble craft which entailed no loss of caste."

The characteristic feature of the gardens of Verona and Florence, Bellagio, Genoa, and Rome, is that they

are placed on hill-sides and laid out in terraces. Our footsteps like our dreams rise ever higher. The parks of the Ile-de-France and Touraine, on the other hand, extend on vast surfaces, flat, or slightly undulating ; their lines develop majestically and produce a harmony somewhat cold and severe, like the fine periods of Racine or Bossuet. Here, the villas have the uneasy aspect of the souls that created them, and those whose sensibility is not excited by surroundings will not appreciate their charm to the full. The vistas of Versailles are never seen to better advantage than in calm and solitude. The Italian avenues with their abrupt windings, their corners of sunshine, or shadow, their heavy scents, are attuned to the moods of passionate and restless hearts.

The perfume of the flowers flows out as day declines. The lawns are studded with beds of pinks. Clumps of crimson salvias blaze fiercely in the slanting rays of the sun. Great red and yellow cannas and pink gladioli bend from the tops of their long stalks as if exhausted. Lichens eat into the statues which rise among the foliage, the only figures in this dream-landscape. The marble is scaling. The trunks of old trees are drying up and dying under the embrace of the stout ivy branches. A moss-grown fountain weeps for the days that are no more. But a gardener's cottage covered with roses and wisteria speaks of realities. It adjoins a wall overgrown with jasmine ; the foliage is starred with white flakes, as after a snow-shower in April. On the first terraces in the most sunny corners oleanders, orange-trees and palms strike a warmer note. And on every side blossoming tuberose send out heavy waves of perfume, subtly intoxicating on this September afternoon.

But the glory of the garden is the cypress-avenue, which climbs the hill, mounting from terrace to terrace. You enter it gravely. Mystery hovers round you. I

know not what solemn influence is at work, checking all inclination to jest and laugh. When you climb the red brick stair, your companion's arm presses yours more closely. You read the inscriptions on the trees : 300, 400, 500 years, and your heart sinks. Three, four, five centuries and more have gone by before the immovable serenity of these venerable cypresses ! And you gaze almost fearfully at these trees, dark as night, rigid, impenetrable to the light and even to the wind which bends them without loosening their leaves, insensible to the seasons, proud and unchanging, rising heavenward stiff and hostile, indifferent to all around them. And yet, from above the palace walls they saw Verona quivering in the joy of triumph, or writhing under the heel of the conqueror. Unheeding sentinels, they remember none of these things. They merely play their decorative part. Their only function is to live, lonely and sterile. We admire them, but we do not love them.

As we mount higher we get a wider view of the town and the famous plain where Constantine defeated the army of Maxentius, where Theodoric vanquished Odoacer, where Charlemagne led his victorious march. From the topmost terrace, the guide points out with emotion the battle-field of Custozza and the tower of Solferino, the *Spia dell' Italia*, whence the Austrian soldiers watched the enemy ; useless now, it looks down only on liberated lands. There are few places in the world where there has been more fighting than on the banks of this Adige, which we can see rushing impetuously out of the long valley where it has been pent, and, as if tired of having followed a straight line so long, doubling back in an elegant and supple curve. Here we note the admirable position of Verona ; situated at the foot of the Alps, encircled and defended by its wide torrential moat, it



commands the Venetian plain and guards the entrance to Lombardy.

The view is almost the same as from the castle of San Pietro. Verona spreads out below with its towers and belfries. The high wall of the amphitheatre casts an immensely elongated shadow. The cupola of San Giorgio in Braida glitters in the last rays of the sun. The bricks of the ancient bridge of the Scaligers seem to be stained with clotted blood. The quays of the Adige show the dark red tones of the sunburnt beggars of Naples. The rushing river is divined rather than seen ; in places it gleams like a damascened shield, as Carducci has described it :

Tal mormoravi possente o rapido  
sotto i romani ponti, o verde Adige,  
brillando dal limpido gorgo,  
la tua scorrente canzone al sole.<sup>1</sup>

To the right are the Brescian Alps, the sharp peak of the Pizzocolo and the mountains that overhang Lake Garda. In front lies the immense plain with its cultivated undulations, whence little towns, belfries and villages emerge. The towers of Mantua are clearly visible on the horizon, and sometimes in bright weather even the line of the Apennines appears. To the east, the hills are so near that they hide Vicenza and Padua ; but the plain stretches away as far as the eye can reach, to the lagoons and the sea which we divine on the horizon.

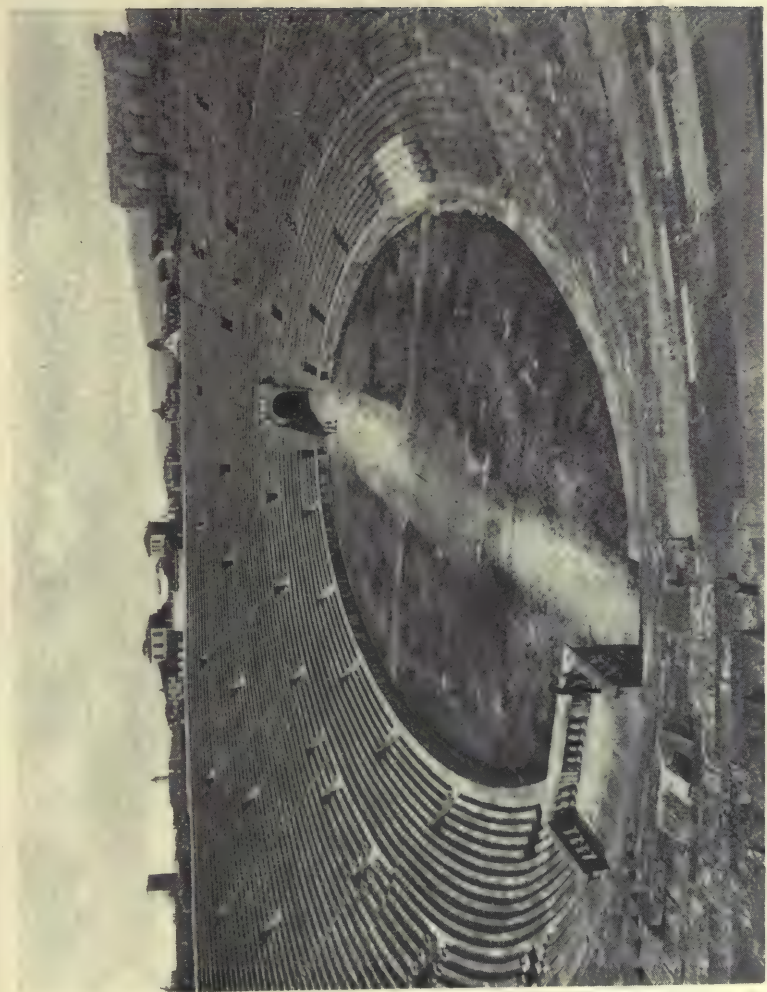
A whole section of Italy is there under my eyes, with the glorious town reclining in graceful majesty in the foreground. The Veronese are very proud of their city, which they often call the Florence of the North.

<sup>1</sup> Thus, O green Adige, thou murmuredst strong and rapid, under the Roman bridges, sending up to the sun thy rippling song, and gleaming from limpid depths.

A 17th century engraving represents it with a Latin inscription which may be rendered thus: "If he who beholds thee does not at once love thee desperately, he has neither a sense of art nor a sense of love." Charlemagne thought it so beautiful that he adjudged it the only city worthy of his son Pépin, who reigned there forty years. It is pleasant to encounter here memories of a Frank adored by his people and long lamented, who still lives in a statue of the Cathedral porch, and in a fresco of the exquisite Church of San Zeno, whose campanile rises through the clear evening air near the ramparts.

We can only really love and understand a city we have looked on from a height. We cannot get an idea of it as a whole from a tower set in the midst of it; all this can give us is a series of views necessarily restricted and incomplete. The most perfect visions of the cities of Italy are obtained on the heights that overlook them. From these, each one seems to be concentrating all its powers to please us, and marshalling all its notes for a deliberate and definitive harmony. Seen from this spot, Verona reveals a design we can never forget. The labyrinth of streets and squares which seemed so complicated co-ordinates itself, the tangle of roofs, churches and palaces, takes its true significance, becomes simple and familiar. Teacher of beauty, the city contracts so harmoniously that we feel as if we could almost seize it in our hands and lift it to our lips.

As the sun sinks, the bricks redden and burn, the painted windows gleam. Strong purple tints float in the air, a warm glow bathes the plain, and rosy mists cling to the cypresses. It is a Poussin evening, grave and noble, a fairy scene in which a city rises triumphantly in the glory of the setting sun. One by one the church bells begin to clang and peal. It is the eve of



AMPHITHEATRE, VERONA





the 8th of September, the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin. The vibrations clash, mingle, and melt into an uninterrupted booming which seems to be raising a sonorous vault over the city, between us and the houses.

Often, seated in the lower part of the garden, near an ancient Venus, I have seen day fading, and darkness gradually creeping over successive terraces. And, as the west grows golden, the tops of the cypresses stand out more darkly, like motionless spindles stiffening in a bath of gold.

To-day I wanted to see Verona falling to sleep from the upper terraces. An impalpable mist, growing denser each moment, like a winding sheet spread out by invisible hands, is drawn over the roofs, drowning all details. Public buildings, churches, squares, the quays of the Adige are still distinct. Darkness simplifies even more than altitude. Only the essential things remain. Our eyes are filled with a vision which will be lasting, because it finds a refuge in the depths of our being, because at this solemn hour before nightfall we behold with all our faculties, with our minds and hearts.

## CHAPTER II

### VICENZA

It is the city of palaces ; this is literally true ; I think no city can boast finer buildings, or greater architects. It is, indeed, interesting to note that even

without Palladio, Vicenza would play a part in the history of architecture. Long before him, superb Gothic houses were built in the town, and a façade still standing here and there attests their splendour. The three Formentons were famous artists, and Trissino, whose name has survived, wrote a didactic treatise to which Palladio paid homage.

There is a whole series of interesting buildings at Vicenza forming a kind of prelude to the work of the Master. The splendour of his achievements makes us over-forgetful of his predecessors during the first Renaissance, and yet, by revealing to us the taste of the Vicenzans for fine architecture, they explain his vocation and his brilliant career in his native place. Palladio, indeed, in spite of his taste for travel (he studied most of the monuments of antiquity *in situ*, at Rome, Ancona, Pola, Spalato, Ravenna, Susa and even at Nîmes) reserved the efforts of his genius almost exclusively for a city so apt to appreciate them. Outside Vicenza, Venice—which owes to him the Church of the Redentore, San Giorgio Maggiore and the façade of San Francesco della Vigna—and Venetia, where he built a few villas, it may be said that there is no important work by Palladio. Vicenza was a sufficient field for his activity; never was a city better prepared to understand an artist, nor an artist better fitted to be understood thereby. His death was lamented unanimously. The poetess Isicratea Monti composed a sonnet in which she declared that Palladio had been summoned to Paradise “to make it more beautiful.” The gossip repeated by President de Brosses is absolutely baseless. “Palladio,” he says, “having been slighted by the nobility of his birthplace avenged himself by introducing a taste for façades so magnificent, that those for whom he made designs were all ruined by their execution.”



The taste for architecture persisted in Vicenza after Palladio, whose teaching was the best guarantee against Baroque excesses. Thanks to him that sense of proportion which is so characteristic of most of the buildings of Upper Italy was preserved. The disastrous influence of Bernini, the Borromini, and the Vanvitelli is scarcely perceptible in this region. After the Master's pupils, of whom Scamozzi was the most distinguished, there was a period of eclipse; but as early as 1700, Palladio once more became the accepted oracle; Ottone Calderari revived his tradition and gave new lustre to Vincenzan architecture.

Thus the streets of the city are a veritable museum, open to all. To walk about in them is to contemplate masterpieces. In this town, which has little more than 40,000 inhabitants, we shall find a hundred palaces or buildings of great interest. We can understand the enthusiasm it has excited among art-critics and men of letters. If some have exaggerated, saying that it was at once the Athens and the Corinth of Italy, Ranalli might well exclaim in his *History of the Fine Arts*: "O veramente avventurosa Vicenza! Altre potranno vincerti di grandezza e potenza, niuna di leggiadria et di bellezza!"<sup>1</sup>

Not having known the splendours of Court life, Vicenza has none of that air of melancholy and decay characteristic of certain towns which were capitals and nothing else, like Parma, or Mantua. Its splendour, which was less dazzling, was more durable. And though its streets are bordered with palaces, it does not impress one as do those Italian cities described by Madame de Staël, "which look as if they had been prepared for the reception of great lords who were to have

<sup>1</sup> "O truly fortunate Vicenza! Others may surpass thee in size and power, but none in grace and beauty."

arrived, but who have been preceded by a few persons of their suite only."

Moreover, the situation of Vicenza is charming, at the confluence of the Retrone and the Bacchiglione, in a fresh valley, between the last spurs of the Alps and the verdant slopes of the Berici mountains. It is, indeed, to quote Courajod, "a spot blessed by Heaven, one of those nests prepared by Nature for the hatching of Italian Art, which did not fail to take possession of it in the spring-tide of the Renaissance.

When Palladio appeared, that spring-tide was long past. The Renaissance had triumphed everywhere. And yet a new era was beginning for architecture. After the golden age, after the great builders, among whom Bramante is conspicuous, we find during the second half of the 16th century a pleiad of architects, the most distinguished of whom is the master of Vicenza. They were primarily theorists. They curbed the bold and sometimes fantastic imagination of their predecessors by canons which fixed the proportions, the dimensions and the ornament of each Order. They were not equal to these predecessors in richness of invention, original inspirations, charming audacities, and above all, a faculty for adapting profuse and elaborate decoration to grandiose lines. With them, detail was a secondary matter, and their great preoccupation was the general effect. Even their columns are merely facings which might be suppressed without robbing the structure of its character. Their art is a little cold, perhaps, but it is never mean, nor does it ever fall into the excesses of the Baroque Style, which abuses detail, diminishing or multiplying it solely with a view to the arbitrary effects at which it aims.

Palladio's only exemplars were the ancients; but he did not copy them slavishly. No artist ever showed

a more ardent devotion to antiquity, ever penetrated more deeply into the very essence of its monuments while preserving an absolute independence of manner, and adapting the old rules with perfect dexterity to modern requirements and a more highly developed sense of comfort. The powerful impression produced by his works comes from their severe simplicity and the constant subordination of parts to the whole. The secret of his radiantly intelligent art is the extreme propriety of its terms. In spite of the formulas he propounded, he never repeated himself. No artist is more varied in his apparent unity ; each of his buildings, each of his façades even, has its individual character. He reduced the exuberant decoration which was in favour at the beginning of the Renaissance to its proper limits, and was careful never to disturb the rhythm of lines by fancifulness of ornament. He is, perhaps, the only architect who never sought an effect of decorative detail, whose sole aims were logical arrangement and perfect proportions. Hence no teaching has been more productive than his. When Michelangelo exclaimed with all the divination of genius : " My learning will create a nation of ignoramuses ! " he felt that the audacities upon which he ventured were only permissible to himself, and that his masterpieces bore within them the germs of dissolution and death for lesser artists who should try to imitate them. Palladio, who sacrificed only to logic, could write his great work *I quattro Libri dell' Architettura* with perfect assurance, and establish laws he knew to be eternal.

Not the least of his titles to fame is the fact that he was the first to give Goethe a concrete image of classic art. No master could have been better fitted to instruct the great German, who, seeking antique beauty, was primarily susceptible to architecture. At Verona, which



he visited before Vicenza, the amphitheatre alone aroused his enthusiasm. The painters had no great interest for the man who at Assisi noticed nothing but the ruins of the temple of Minerva ; he, himself, admits this quite frankly : “ I confess that I know little of the art and craft of the painter ; so my observations will be confined to the practical part, that is to say, subjects, and the manner in which they are treated.”

I have made many sojourns at Vincenza in the past, and this year I proposed to study more especially those buildings by Palladio which had appealed most strongly to Goethe, and to trace their influence on his genius.

On his arrival at Vicenza on 19th September, 1786, Goethe went at once to the Teatro Olimpico. He thought it “ inexpressibly beautiful,” and at once pronounced its author “ essentially a great man.” Few buildings, indeed, produce such a strong effect as this, the last jewel bequeathed by Palladio to his native city. Who, that has seen it, can forget the grace of the elliptical interior, the colonnade above the seats with its entablature of statues, and, above all, the superb façade of the proscenium, in which the master sought to give a summary of his genius, enriching it with all his science and all his art. He had the happiness of seeing its completion before he closed his eyes. The two super-posed Orders and the attic are supremely elegant. Three magnificent bays open on to the stage, carrying out a formula dear to the architect, *i.e.*, a large central door, high and wide, with an arch, and two lower and narrower lateral doors. The building was finished by Scamozzi from Palladio’s plans ; he completed it by designing the scenery, which represents, it is said, the road to Thebes.

The success of the undertaking was immense. All Italy envied this theatre, in which the works of the most famous authors were acted. When one of

the last of the Gonzagas, the strange Vespasiano, wanted a theatre for his capital, Sabbioneta, which he had built in exact imitation of Athens, he asked Scamozzi to reproduce that of Vicenza for him. Nor has admiration waned with the lapse of years. When Napoleon entered the theatre, some years later than Goethe, he turned to the Queen of Bavaria, who was with him, and said: "Madame, we are in Greece." It was, in fact, the love of Greece and of antiquity which had inspired the work. An "Olympic Academy" of which Palladio was one of the promoters, had been founded at Vincenza in 1556, with the object of reviving interest in masterpieces. The architect was invited to build a wooden theatre in the Basilica for the representation of a *Sophonisba* by his friend and protector, Trissino. The success was so great that the members of the Academy determined to build at their own expense the actual theatre on a site generously given to them by the Commune of Vicenza. It was inaugurated in 1585 with the representation of an *Œdipus*, translated by Orsata Justiniani, a Venetian noble. Among the actors was that Verato for whom Tasso wrote one of his finest sonnets; and in the last act, the part of *Œdipus* was played by Luigi Grotto, the dramatic author, who had been blind from his birth. Justiniani's verses were, no doubt, mediocre, but this mattered little. The Vicenzans had thrilled to antique beauty.

The Basilica, which next claimed Goethe's admiration, is perhaps the architectural masterpiece of the 16th century. Burckhardt declares that at Venice it would have wholly eclipsed Sansovino's Libreria, one of the gems of the Piazza di San Marco. It is, in any case, the marvel of that Piazza dei Signori which is so picturesquely completed by the Loggia del Capitano, the Church of San Vicente, the Bertoliana Library, the great

red brick tower, and the two white marble columns, on one of which the Venetian lion still asserts the ancient might of the City of the Doges. Vicenza, whose passion for fine buildings was so pronounced, had, of course, long dreamed of restoring its old communal palace. Many plans had been submitted. All the architects of the region, those who had adorned Venice: Sansovino, the creator of the Libreria; Riccio, who had built the inner façade of the Doge's Palace and the Giant's Staircase; Spaventa, the author of the Procuratie; Sanmicheli and Giulio Romano urged the adoption of their designs. Palladio himself sent in four, and it was one of these which was accepted. The architect was barely thirty years old at the time; no career ever began more gloriously. This gigantic work occupied three-quarters of a century and the master did not live to finish it; but it was so far advanced before his death that he had no doubts as to its beauty. Never was his genius more fully displayed. He was not called upon to build a palace from a conception of his own brain; he had to make use of the old walls, consolidate and extend them, and yet to produce an entirely new, sumptuous and original whole. Intelligence, science, invention, skill and flexibility of the highest order were necessary for such a task; Palladio possessed them all to a degree nothing short of astounding in view of the difficulties he had to overcome. We are dazzled by so much splendour and majesty; we ask ourselves above all how such a result could have been obtained by lines so simple, and relatively so bare of ornament. The two-storeyed porticoes of his design solve the problem involved to perfection. It is impossible to imagine more complete harmony between the new facing and the internal pillars which support the original structure. No one ignorant of the history of the building could



imagine that the actual façades were not the faces it once presented to the world. The arches rest on slender coupled columns, which enlarge the openings and give lightness to the general effect; they are Doric in the lower storey and Ionic in the upper, with entablatures to correspond, in accordance with Palladio's favourite formula, a formula to which he has given his name; for a long time no other was admitted; it was universal at that period, even in buildings imagined by painters, as for instance in Veronese's *Feast in the House of Levi*, where architecture plays such an important part.

The Rotunda delighted Goethe even more than the Teatro Olimpico and the Basilica. It is approached by the walk which is one of the chief attractions of Vicenza, a wide avenue shaded by fine chestnuts and flanked by a portico over 2,000 feet long, which rises on the slope of Monte Berico and ends at the culminating point, the Church of the Madonna del Monte. There are windows in the walls at intervals, with unexpected glimpses of the town and of the hills on which the heroic comrades of Daniele Manini fell in 1848. The country people ascend on donkeys, or in odd little carts with seats fixed in the middle. As we mount, the view extends over the plain towards Bassano and Padua, a vast green expanse covered with vines, punctuated by the black spears of cypresses and the campaniles of the nearest villages. Half way up the incline, at the intersection of another road, the avenue makes a bend, curving into a sort of terrace, whence there is a magnificent panorama of Vicenza with its sea of red roofs dominated by the cupola of the cathedral, the imposing mass of the Basilica, the upper arcades of which are clearly visible, and the graceful silhouette of the tower, which seems to be watching over the city like the bell-fries of Flemish towns.

To get to the Rotunda we must quit the portico and take a strange little path paved with cobble stones which runs between walls, first high and bare as those of a prison, and then gay with draperies of Virginian creeper. We skirt the Villa Fogazzaro, where the famous writer pursues his noble meditations, and the Villa Valmarana, where Tieopolo's frescoes slumber. The walls are crowned by the grotesque grimacing figures which abound in the villas of the district, notably those on the banks of the Brenta. It was an odd fancy of the people of the 18th century to set up these deformed guardians of their homes along their walls. The stone crumbles away from day to day, and sometimes it is difficult to make out the oddly dressed and contorted mannikins. Then the path becomes rural. The pavement makes way for grass, dappled with aromatic mint. Pines and cypresses shoot up from behind the walls. We cross a road and we are before the Rotunda.

Alas ! visitors are no longer admitted. The *Signora madre* to whom it belonged died, they tell me, a month or two ago, and her son and successor will not allow it to be shown. However, we may go into the gardens. We shall not be able to see the rooms, but this is unimportant. The masterpiece is the building itself and the exquisite site it adorns, the most agreeable spot imaginable, *amenissimo*, as Palladio himself declared. These Renaissance houses were, indeed, built primarily for the delight of the eye. In fact, this has always been the case in Italy. Read the letter in which Pliny the Younger described his beloved Laurentum, you will see that the question of a spacious and comfortable lodging was quite a secondary one. The desideratum was not a French château, nor one of the comfortable structures of Northern countries, but merely a *villa*, that is to say, a place of repose and enjoyment, where life

would be gay and full of sunshine. Paolo Almerico, who had this Rotunda built, was a simple churchman, the Referendary of Popes Pius V. and Pius VI. The domain passed later to the Marchese di Capra, whose name is still legible above the main entrance.

The building is a square, each side of which is faced by a peristyle of six Ionic columns supporting a triangular pediment adorned with statues. Within this square is a circular hall on the ground level, entered by four doors corresponding to the peristyles, which form so many little terraces offering views in every direction. And this is the secret of the incomparable charm of this Rotunda; the prospect on every side is admirable. On the north, the undulating plain of Vicenza, the line of the Alps forming a majestic background; on the west, the slopes dominated by the Madonna del Monte; on the south, the green flanks of the Berici hills; but the finest view of all is from the terrace on the east guarded by three ancient eagles and a swan in stone; we see the entire valley of the Brenta as far as Padua and the Euganean Hills, which are distinguishable on a clear day. In the foreground all around the Rotunda are gardens, fields, meadows, clumps of flowers and thickets of lilacs which form a scented girdle in spring-time.

The melancholy thought of the flight of time and the fragility of joy was nowhere and at no period more in evidence than in Italy at the time of the Renaissance. *Di doman non c'è certezza* (there is no certainty of to-morrow) said Lorenzo de' Medici in his poem. And, so, in the midst of the gravest events and the direst catastrophes the rich and cultured thought only of enjoying themselves in peace. This morning at this villa, I think of that Luigi Cornaro, who had witnessed the most terrible warfare and the sack of Padua, and, who, in his



treatise, *Della Vita Sobria*, drew up what may be described as the code of the perfect dilettante. How lovingly he describes his "fair house at Padua, so marvellously situated, so skilfully protected from the heat of summer and the rigour of winter, with its gardens watered by running streams." In spring and autumn he knew no greater pleasure than a few weeks in his villa, on a hill "whence there is an exquisite view of the Euganean Hills." Nearly all the Italian poets—except Dante and Leopardi, whose widely divergent pessimisms are to be explained by very personal causes—have sung the joy of life. The appetite for pleasure in this country often becomes a kind of delirium, a frenzy which made Goethe say one Shrove Tuesday evening: "I seem to have spent this day with madmen." In no country were public festivities of greater importance, and the greatest artists rivalled each other in contributing to such displays. Palladio himself designed the triumphal arch erected at Venice in 1574 for the reception of Henry III. The Carnival, torchlight processions, and fireworks are Italian inventions. Here at Vicenza itself, a chronicler of the 14th century speaks of a fête given by the College of Notaries, when "a firework composition went off with such a din that most of those present fell backwards, overcome by terror; it represented in fiery outline the Holy Spirit, the Prophets, and a flaming dove descending upon the altar."

Moreover, in spite of war and pillage, these Lombardo-Venetian provinces were always rich. Even in the hard years of the 14th and 15th centuries the Communes found it necessary to pass sumptuary laws. The industry of precious stuffs developed so greatly that towns like Vicenza sent annually to Venice over a hundred pieces of gold and silver brocade. It is comprehensible enough that nobles and citizens so well-to-pass should

have commissioned Palladio to build them the palaces of Vicenza, and the sumptuous country houses of which only the ruins now remain. For, alas! here everything is perishing! The statues, the columns, the staircases, the walls are crumbling. Grass grows between the disjointed stones and bricks. I remember that long ago I used to wish some rich purchaser would restore the Rotunda. But now I no longer venture on such a wish. It would perhaps be the worst thing that could befall it, the surest death sentence of all this beauty. Better that this villa should not be repaired, renewed, modernised, lighted by electricity . . . The utmost we should wish is that its decay should be arrested, that this vestige of a bygone splendour and period should be preserved as long as possible without any modification of its character.

There is a majesty in the structure which explains Goethe's enthusiasm. "I do not think," he says, "that it would be possible to carry the luxury of architecture farther. The four peristyles and the stairs occupy more space than the palace itself. Each of the façades would make an imposing entrance to a temple. . . . The proportions of the circular hall are admirable" He also praises the art with which the site was chosen. "Not only is the building to be seen in all its magnificence from every point of the surrounding country, but the view from the Rotunda itself is most delightful. One sees the Bacchiglione flowing onward, carrying boats to the Brenta."

I think that on this 21st September, 1786, the path that leads to the Rotunda was perhaps Goethe's road to Damascus. The Privy Councillor and Prime Minister of Duke Charles Augustus of Saxe-Weimar, travelling under the name of Johann Philipp Möller, had left Germany without informing his friends, consumed by

a burning, almost a morbid desire to see Italy. He confesses this in one of the first letters he wrote after crossing the frontier. "For several years," he writes from Venice on the 12th of October, "I could not bear to see a Latin author, or to look at anything which reminded me of Italy. When this happened by accident, I suffered horribly. Herder sometimes laughed at me for learning all my Latin from Spinoza; he had noticed that this was the only Latin book I read; he did not know how I was obliged to be on my guard against the ancients, and that I took refuge in these abstruse generalities with anguish in my heart. . . If I had not made the decision I am now carrying out, I should have been utterly undone, so passionately was my soul possessed by the desire to see Italy with my own eyes." For ten years, absorbed in political, and administrative affairs, he had published scarcely anything. At most he had sketched out one or two great works. He felt that these skeletons could not take on flesh and live in the German surroundings which were stifling him, in the gossiping Court illuminated only by the clear eyes of Charlotte von Stein; they needed Italian sun. He felt that he must see the spots where the immortal masterpieces were born, know classic beauty, not merely in the spirit and in books, but in itself, and stand face to face with the buildings it had inspired. Among the papers he took away with him were some fragments of dramas and poems, a few scenes of his *Tasso*, which had been laid aside for years. But the most voluminous of the bundles was the manuscript of *Iphigenia*. She, the Greek maiden whom he called "the child of my sufferings," was only to come to life on classic ground. And, indeed, three months later, at the beginning of January, 1787, the piece was finished, and he read it to his friends in Rome. He tells us himself that crossing





TEATRO OLIMPICO, VICENZA.



the Brenner, he had taken it out from his luggage so as to have it constantly under his hand. A few days later the maiden awoke to life herself, far from Northern mists, in the magnolia thickets of Lake Garda. "On these shores," he writes, "where I felt as lonely as my heroine on the shores of Tauris, I marked out the plan." But it was here at Vicenza that he had his revelation of Latin genius, here that his wondering eyes opened to Beauty and to Reason as those of Faust opened to recovered youth, and here that he had the first clear and luminous vision of the tragedy he meant to write. Palladio worked the miracle.

Goethe's enthusiasm for the great architect was such that he was greatly interested in seeing at old Ottavio Scamozzi's house, the original woodcuts for the *Works of Palladio* which Scamozzi had just published. And a little later, at Padua, he bought a new edition of these Works with copperplate engravings, due to the pious care of an English Consul at Venice, named Smith, whom he pronounced, "a man of great merit, too early taken away from the friends of art," and to whom he paid further homage in the cemetery of the Lido. The citizen of Frankfort was much astonished to note the reverence in which Palladio was held by all. When he entered the shop there were five or six persons who at once began to compliment him on his acquisition. "Taking me for an architect," he says, "they congratulated me on my desire to study Palladio, who, in their opinion, ranked far higher than Vitruvius, because he had penetrated more deeply into antiquity, and had succeeded in making it applicable to modern times."

To penetrate antiquity and apply it to the needs of modern times was surely first the secret desire and then the sole endeavour of Goethe himself. To maintain tradition, to enlarge the laws of antique wisdom by



modern science were in short the identical aims of Goethe and of Palladio. Both, in common with all true artists and all true writers, sought to solve the eternal problem of reconciling immutable law and mutable life, to conquer the eternal difficulty, which is, says Barrès "to have a style and yet remain true and natural." Was it not of himself that the author of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* was thinking when he said of Palladio: "His conceptions have a touch of the divine, akin to the creative power of the poet, who from a mixture of truth and falsehood, brings forth a new work whose borrowed life enchants us."

And this was why *Iphigenia* became the drama of Goethe himself, the drama of a mind in quest of order and beauty, at first obscured by Germanic chaos, then calmed by the Greco-Latin genius and its supreme equilibrium. Confronting Orestes and his romantic fury, he set the radiant figure of Iphigenia, the type of antique Wisdom and Reason. Thus, when he read the work to German artists they were astonished. "They were expecting something like *Goetz von Berlichingen*," says Goethe, "and they found it difficult to accustom themselves to the calm and regular march of *Iphigenia*."

Goethe came to Italy to deliver himself from Weimar; in less than a year, the evolution was accomplished. Begun at Vicenza, it was completed in Rome. "It is a year to-day," he writes, "since I left Carlsbad. What a memorable day! It is the anniversary of my birth to a new life. I cannot reckon up all I have gained in the course of this year; and, yet, I have only begun to understand." His joy overflows perpetually in his letters and in those Roman Elegies in which he put so much of himself. "How happy I am," he exclaims at the beginning of the seventh of these, "when I think of the time in the North when a gray daylight wrapped

me round, and a heavy, sullen sky pressed on my neck." He had found internal peace and joy. The scales, as he said, had fallen from his eyes. He had bathed in the very well-springs of Beauty. Thenceforth his work was to have a deeper meaning ; it was to become, as Nietzsche has said, the only classic work of Germany. Is it not moving to think that it was here that he saw clearly for the first time, under the light of Latin skies, and before the buildings of Palladio ?

## CHAPTER III

## CONEGLIANO

FEW cities present themselves so gaily and seductively to the traveller as does Conegliano. Standing where the Vittorio road debouches, on the last spur of the Pre-Alps, whence it dominates the valley of the Piave, its outskirts are extraordinarily attractive ; it seems to hold out its arms and invite the visitor to enter. It is not unusual in Italy to find towns which have preserved their ramparts, while relieving them of their martial aspect by planting them with trees and transforming them into shady walks. Conegliano has done better still ; on the side that overlooks the plain it has built its houses on the foundations of the old walls, and transformed the moats into smiling gardens which form a half circle of flowers and greenery. On the other side the village climbs the hill side in terraces, overlooked by a battlemented castle whose pink bricks appear between the cypress spears.

It is rather difficult to find the entrance to the cathedral, and, I am obliged to ask my way. I light upon the most charming of men who at once lays aside his own occupations to guide me, and is lavish of attentions. I recall Musset's pretty definition of Italy in *Bettine*, as "that country of charming, kindly, honest, hospitable freedom, under the splendid sun where one man's shadow has never been in the way of another, and where one makes a friend by asking the way." The door of the Cathedral opens from a kind of portico adjoining private houses and shops. The church itself is small and of little interest; but it contains a masterpiece, one of the best pictures of Conegliano's most famous son, the good painter Cima. I love those towns and buildings to which one journeys to see a single work, especially when that work is still in the very place for which it was conceived and executed; the fact that it is unique and that you have been put to some trouble to see it gives it a special charm which it would not have had in a museum among many others. I find the picture on a temporary altar, pending certain repairs that are being made in the choir, which it had not quitted since the day that Cima painted it. The light is very good, especially in the morning, and shows the magnificent composition and the warm colour to advantage. I can think of no Madonna with a nobler face. The six Saints are also full of dignity and majesty; if they have a fault it is perhaps that they are a little stiff, a little wanting in vitality. Two little angel musicians at the foot of the throne are exquisite in their simplicity and gravity of attitude; their flesh is of a beautiful olive tint. The picture is entirely filled up with figures, which is unusual for Cima, who habitually painted delightful landscape backgrounds, notably views of the hill of Conegliano. There is no smiling



grace in this work ; he seems to have put all the gravity of his soul into this altarpiece for the church of his native place. The *Madonna and Saints* in the Accademia at Venice reproduces practically the same subject, with the addition of a landscape, but, as it seems to me, with less emotion. In both canvases we note the somewhat childish symmetry which makes Perugino's works so cold ; the equilibrium is the result less of the adjustment of the masses of colour than of the similarity of the personages on either side of the principal group.

The Conegliano picture dates from the end of the fifteenth century ; it is only a few years earlier than the first masterpieces of Giorgione and Titian. Cima remained the pupil of Vivarini. True, he was influenced by Giovanni Bellini, but he never sought to surpass him, as did his illustrious rivals, disciples like himself of the Venetian master. Cima was always a Primitive. He is perhaps the only Venetian in whom we divine something of Tuscan or Umbrian fervour. He has been called the Masaccio of Venice, which is an exaggeration, for were it true he would be in the forefront of the Quattrocento painters. He did not go so far as Masaccio ; he was no innovator ; but no one surpassed him in tenderness and religious poetry. He was a moderate, a discreet dreamer, a calm spirit. He belonged to that category of artists who are faithful all their lives to the ideal of their youth, and thus very soon seem to be behind the times.

Leaving the church, I climbed up to the Castle, all rosy in the warm light. The way is through narrow tortuous streets without side-walk, paved with sharp cobbles, under arcades and vaults that seem ready to fall on one, up flights of ruined steps. Heavy doors open on to tiny gardens. Faces are enframed in windows gay with geraniums. Here and there a few modern

shop-fronts, in spite of their miserable appearance, have an alien look in the solitary streets where one is startled by the noise of one's own footsteps. The soul of the past hovers round these ancient buildings. And there is something intensely poignant about these homes of an ancient city where nothing has changed ; the contrast is the more striking when, leaving the new quarters sunning themselves joyously, we enter the city of the past which suffocated for centuries between mountain and ramparts. There the façades have grave faces like those of old men, in which we read the melancholy born of having seen too much, and of thoughts turned ever upon death. After the last houses, the path skirts old rusty walls which the warm sunshine consoles for their abandonment. Between the disjointed stones spring the fine grasses and mosses that grow only in solitude.

From the terrace in front of the Castle there is a magnificent view of the Trevisan plain and the valley of the Piave ; the course of the stream slackens as it approaches the lagoons which on very clear days may be seen in the distance. Above the fields the delicate Venetian mist is already floating. To the North, the view extends to the first buttresses of the Alps, over a series of verdant hill-sides and wooded mountains, studded with villas and little towns grouped round a bell-tower. The slopes are covered with famous vineyards which produce a sparkling, perfumed wine ; nowhere are the vines better cultivated than at Conegliano, which is very proud of its Royal School of Viticulture. In the distance, the dying sun gilds one of those big white clouds in which the Greeks believed that the immortals concealed themselves when travelling through the ether, and which afterwards served painters of all schools for the scenes in which God comes down to

earth. The rays of sunlight slip between the battlements and the trees like airy scarves. The tops of the tall cypresses sway very slightly in the breeze ; against the dazzling sky they look like the masts of a ship gently rocked by a calm sea. It is the unreal hour when things are decked in all the varying shades of pink, that fugitive and passing pink which is not a true colour, and recalls the uncertain tint of those wan blossoms which, in a bouquet of red and white flowers, look like softened reflections of the two.

Through the iron gates, the inner courtyard of the Castle smiles so invitingly that I want to go in. A small *buonamano* overcomes the custodian's scruples. We may stay till nightfall in this old garden, so eloquent of the past with its cypresses, its oleanders, its walls of red brick burning in the last rays of light. The walks are narrow and ill-kept, but, gradually, the garden widens out. A soft haze rises from the warm earth, blurs all forms and spreads mystery round us. As the shadow grows denser, love takes on a sudden gravity. We cease talking, hushed by the silence of things. Ah ! the languor of those Italian evenings among the perfumes, the delight of a dear companionship when everything fades and seems about to die. Without another heart beside me, I could not await night in this old garden. I remember the words of Dumas the Elder, when, after his travels in Switzerland, he arrived at Lake Maggiore, felt all the horrors of solitude on the very first evening, and expressed his thoughts in this charming formula : " To hope or to fear for another is the only thing which gives man a complete sense of his own existence." In the turmoil and agitation of the day, we do not feel loneliness ; but in the peace of evening, we cannot bear it.

The wind has dropped completely. The spray of



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the cypresses hangs congealed against the dark sky. In the distance a fountain murmurs its eternal, monotonous song. Suddenly, a note breaks the silence. It is a belated nightingale that has lingered, beguiled no doubt by the tranquil charm of this summer garden. We do not see it; it must be in that oleander thicket, on that branch that is stirring. It preludes timidly at first, repeats the same note softly, as if murmuring. It questions the darkness and listens to the silence. Then, believing itself alone, and intoxicated by the nocturnal sweetness around it, it bursts into full song. The trills follow one another, ever stronger; they become cries of joy and of desire. It throws out piercing notes at intervals, the love-call becomes ever more clamant. And each time we tremble as did the lovers of Verona when they heard the nightingale singing on a pomegranate-tree in the garden of the Capulets.

### CHAPTER IV

#### BASSANO

LESS elevated and less hemmed in by mountains than Belluno, yet higher above the Venetian plain than Conegliano, Bassano is admirably placed on the outlet of the Brenta. It has a very imposing appearance with its ruined ivy-grown ramparts, its promenade with enormous lime-trees, its red brick castle with square towers which evokes a most agitated and warlike past. Claimed and fought for successively by powerful neighbours, Vicenza, Padua, Verona and Milan, it only knew

peace during the four centuries of the Venetian domination ; and it paid dearly for this term of tranquillity during the wars of the French Revolution and of the Empire. As it was necessary to hold it in order to secure passage or retreat, all the campaigns of the French army were marked by an episode here. In a few years the town was taken and retaken ten times. Ardently patriotic, it fought in the forefront together with Pieve and Belluno during the struggle for independence, and like them offered itself with spontaneous enthusiasm to the House of Savoy.

Bassano's greatest pride is its old covered bridge, the history of which would require a chapter to itself. In the course of the last four centuries it has been necessary to rebuild it more than ten times, sometimes in stone, more often in wood ; it has been carried away by torrents, burnt or destroyed in warfare. The present bridge replaced that which Eugène Beauharnais burnt in 1813 ; there are French bullets still imbedded in the stones of the piers. Shorter, but wider than that of Pavia over the Ticino, it has a good deal of character, especially as seen from the bed of the river. It completes most picturesquely the picture formed by the city with its terraced houses and gardens, their foundations descending to the river which at times shakes them somewhat roughly. Above, the ancient fortress rises over the roofs and trees. The whole hill is reflected in the pure water, ruffled only by the darting flight of swallows hawking invisible insects.

As at Pieve di Cadore, at Bassano we might look in vain for a straight, level street. The roads rise and wind and intersect in the most amusing entanglement. Some of them are, as it were, suspended over the valley. Gates open upon the country and seem to enframe the horizon. The little squares and terraces with glimpses of scenery

which the inhabitants reserved for the delight of the eye, add greatly to the charm of the town. One of the most happily placed is the Piazza del Terraglio, whence Napoleon is said to have made his plan for the battle. But no panorama equals that to be seen from the famous Balcone dell' Arciprete, in the presbytery of the Cathedral, which occupies a part of the buildings of the ancient citadel. The view extends in every direction. To the east the hills of Asolo slope gently towards the plain; it was in the midst of them, at Possagno, that Canova was born; a white marble building on the model of the Pantheon of Rome, contains works and copies of works by the sculptor, and also the perishable body of him whom his admirers ventured to compare to Michelangelo. To the north, behind a foreground of houses and gardens, the valley, studded with villas and little towns, is closed by an amphitheatre of mountains, which just leave room for the river to pass. To the left, the heights fringe the plateau of the Seven Communes, that strange country the inhabitants of which lived for centuries almost isolated from the rest of the world, forming a German island in Italian territory like that still existing to the north of Verona in the region of the Thirteen Communes. Further to the west, at the foot of the hills of Marostica, the plain stretches away towards Vicenza, as far as the Berici Mountains.

The Museum of Bassano is of some importance. It contains notably a rich collection of the engravings of all countries, and a room devoted to the works of Canova, either originals or reproductions. But faithful to my habits, I intend to study the works of the Bassani only in this, their city. It is not surprising that they should be numerous, as there were no fewer than six painters bearing the name of Da Ponte. They were one of those



curious Italian families whose members from father to son, devoted themselves to the magic calling, *la mirabile e clarissima arte di pittura*. And I recall the charming picture in the Uffizi, where Jacopo has represented himself with all his sons united in the worship of art.

The six Da Pontes include the grandfather, Francesco, the father Jacopo, and the four sons, Francesco, Giambattista, Leandro and Girolamo. Among these the only one who really counts is Jacopo ; he is *the* Bassano ; it is to him that a grateful city has raised a statue. His very numerous works are scattered throughout the galleries of Europe. The Museum of Bassano possesses a dozen, among them the *S. Valentine baptising a young Girl*, very warm in colour, and his masterpiece, the *Nativity*, a work of extraordinary freshness and richness ; the light is very skilfully concentrated on the Virgin, and the scene is set in a fine bluish landscape. It was in these compositions, at once devotional and rustic, that he excelled. Unfortunately nearly all his pictures have darkened very much, and so have become monotonous. No painter has excelled him as a craftsman, or in knowledge of the secrets of his calling. He was an accomplished practitioner, a virtuoso of the palette ; but this is the extent of his art. His figures do not live, and have no character ; their faces and gestures are always heavy and insignificant. What is remarkable, however, is that Bassano is the most realistic of the 16th century Venetian painters ; it was he who introduced *genre* into Italian art, that is to say, the rendering of scenes from actual life. Hitherto, painting had been only religious or historical ; it rarely condescended to the observation of Nature and of familiar scenes. Bassano studied animals carefully, seeking to accentuate the character of each beast. Sometimes even, he tried to carry truth as far as illusion, and, in some forgotten book, I once

read an anecdote telling how Annibale Carracci came into his room and put out his hand to take a book Jacopo had painted on the table.

A perfect technician, Bassano was an excellent teacher. Veronese did not hesitate to choose him among the ten to whom he entrusted the artistic education of his son, Carletto. He had the gift of teaching. He wished to make four painters of his four sons. But two never rose above the rank of copyists, or studio assistants. The other two have left a few works not without merit: Francesco, pictures of ceremonial, or history, notably in the Doge's Palace in Venice; Leandro, religious compositions and some good portraits, the best of which, a sober and vigorous work, is that of the Podestà Lorenzo Capello, in the Museum of Bassano.

But how wearisome it is to look at these dark canvases, on which time has laid a sort of opaque varnish. And how delightful it is to come back to the light! Let us stroll along the splendid promenades that encircle the town. The views from these are magnificent over the spurs of the Alps and the valley of the Brenta. The various panoramas we saw as a whole from the terrace of the presbytery present themselves one by one. These views, declares George Sand in her *Lettres d'un Voyageur*, "are among the most welcome changes that can befall a traveller weary of the classic masterpieces of Italy."

I could not find that Café des Fosses described by the author of *Lélia* in one of those curious letters she wrote in the spring of 1834 "to a poet," as the contents table of the book says, in which she speaks to him with superb irresponsibility of the "doctor," and of the breakfast she had shared with him at this inn at Bassano "on a carpet of grass, starred with primroses, a breakfast of excellent coffee, mountain butter and bread flavoured with aniseed." She invites Musset to a similar breakfast

in the same place later on ; “ when you will know all ; life will hold no further secrets for you. Your hair will be turning gray, and mine will be already white ; but the valley of Bassano will be no less beautiful.” Then she went off to the Tyrol ; she proposed to climb inaccessible rocks and pass over unexplored peaks. But, as a fact, she only got as far as Oliero, a few miles from Bassano ; and by way of Possagno, which gave her a pretext for tirades about Canova, she came back to Treviso, in a cart drawn by she-asses, seated among kids which a peasant was taking to market. She declares that she slept fraternally with the innocent beasts destined for the butcher’s knife on the morrow. “ This thought,” she adds, “ inspired me with an invincible horror of their master, and I did not exchange a word with him the whole way.”

I have always had a weakness for those Venetian letters of George Sand’s, written when she was thirty years old, the outpourings of a suffering spirit tortured by doubt. In the midst of innumerable dissertations on the most various subjects, we note the constant struggles of a passionate soul against the fetters of society and the bondage of opinion, in all their moving sincerity. We already find in them that voluptuous ideality which underlies all her work and all her life, and, above all, her ardent love of nature. She invariably prefers the emotion prompted by the beauty of things to that induced by art. “ The creations of art,” she says, “ speak only to the mind, and the spectacle of nature speaks to all our faculties. The beauty of landscape adds a sensuous pleasure to the purely intellectual pleasure of admiration. The coolness of water, the perfume of flowers, the harmonies of the wind circulate in the blood and in the nerves at the moment when the splendour of colours and the beauty of forms stir



the imagination." No writer has more successfully associated psychological states with natural surroundings. How many lyrical passages one might select from her works for a book to be called *Landscapes of Passion*, a title I chose for a volume of my own in which I too tried my hand at wedding picturesque description to action. This evening it is pleasant to evoke the memory of the too ardent pilgrim of love here under the lime-trees of Bassano, and to think that she once breathed this same south wind that blows so warmly on me, full of the perfumes of the gardens of the Brenta.

## CHAPTER V

## MASER

FINDING myself close to Maser and Fanzolo, I decided to revisit the famous villas built there by Palladio. There is no more delightful experience for a traveller than to return to the beautiful places that formerly enchanted him. He knows that his earlier impressions will be revived, but he is also eager to know how far they will be enriched. Moreover, I had seen the villas in spring-time embowered in lilacs and flowering shrubs; what new charm would autumn lend them? In one of his recent lectures on Molière, M. Maurice Donnay wittily compared Don Juan to those hasty tourists who visit the towns of Italy between two trains, who arrive, rush to church or museum, and set off again. "They have seen the town one morning, one afternoon of spring or autumn; they will never see it again under other skies,

with other tints ; they never lean on a balustrade whence there is a view of the landscape, they never dream by the riverside, they never wander in the little crooked streets, they never pass through the iron gates of gardens. They pass ; it was for them that Baedeker conceived that admirable chapter-heading : Venice in four days." Do not let us follow their example ; let us enter the iron gates of fair gardens and Palladian villas.

The characteristically Italian desire for a pleasure-house was always strongly developed among the Venetians. Cut off from pastoral scenery, and even to a great extent from verdure, they had a longing to get away from the canals and the little paved streets where the air never changes, to walk on real earth, to see trees and grass. The little islands of the lagoon and the banks of the Brenta were first covered with houses and gardens. Then the rich families went farther afield ; they bought land on the Euganean Hills, and even on those mountains of Bassano, the blue outline of which they saw on the horizon each time their gondolas, emerging from the Rio San Felice or the Rio dei Mendicanti, made for San Michele or Murano.

It was natural enough that the Barbaro brothers, Daniele, Patriarch of Aquilea, one of the highest dignitaries of the church, and Marc-Antonio, Ambassador of the Republic to Catherine de' Medici and Sixtus V., Procurator of S. Marco and the negotiator of the peace after Lepanto, should have desired a rural palace worthy of themselves and of their rank. They applied to the greatest artists of their day, to Andrea Palladio for the architecture, to Alessandro Vittoria for the sculptural decoration, and to Veronese for the frescoes. The result of this triple collaboration was the lordly dwelling which passed at the end of the 18th century from the Barbaro family to Lodovico Manin, the last Doge of

Venice, and after long years of neglect became the Villa Giacomelli, the name of the amiable owner who has restored it, and was good enough to do the honours of it to me.

The villa, in accordance with the plan generally adopted by Palladio, is set against the slope of a hill, whence it rises slightly above the plain; it consists of a central *palazzo* in the form of a temple with four Ionic columns supporting a triangular pediment, and lateral buildings somewhat lower, preceded by arcades and terminated by two pavilions suggestive of dove-cotes, the ground-floors of which the architect designed to be respectively the wine-press and the coach-house. Behind, a courtyard communicates with the first storey of the central building, and is on a level with it. "This court," says Palladio, "is on a level with the soil of the hill-side, which was lowered and cut on purpose to serve as the site of a fountain richly decorated with stuccoes and paintings." Alessandro Vittoria, Sansovino's partner, carried out this decoration, as well as the general ornamentation of the *palazzo* and the gardens. In it he displays all his manipulative skill and his ardent temperament; but as always, he shows a lack of restraint and aims too obviously at effect. There is excess in the profusion of statues and vases that crowd round the house; these sumptuous accessories and this over-emphatic splendour are out of harmony with the extreme simplicity of the villa itself.

Veronese undertook the frescoes, and no work could have been better suited to his taste and to his powers. They were the freest fantasies of an artist who never painted but to delight the eye. All that could enliven a dwelling, and distract the minds of persons who came to the country to rest, this prince of decorators, untrammelled by any set programme, scattered broadcast.



Heathen divinities, heroes, ephebi, virtues, vices, loves, garlands of fruit and flowers, landscapes, animals, illusory portraits and statues, simulated columns, Veronese represented as fancy suggested, thinking only of our amusement and of his own. Restrained from the representation of the nude in his official compositions, he took advantage of his freedom here. All the mythological and allegorical figures appear as beautiful women with blooming carnations ; if they have a fault it is that they are a little inexpressive, and all very much alike ; their opulent forms are too uniformly superb. Moreover, some passages are lax and languid in handling ; the subjects, often puerile, have no connection one with the other. But what matters it ? Veronese had been asked to decorate, not to paint pictures. He had merely to beautify surfaces, to hang the walls with brilliant frescoes as with tapestries. What task could have been more congenial to him who was the most delightful of story-tellers, the most skilful stage-manager of Venetian festivities ? But we must not look for any thought, any expression of moral or intellectual life. Veronese was a hand and not a brain. Never was a dazzling palette at the service of a less erudite artist ; for him, æsthetic rules were limited, as he said in his famous reply to the tribunal of the Holy Office, to putting into a picture " things that look well in it." He declared further that " the painter may claim the licence allowed to poets and madmen, and that he should continue to paint in accordance with his understanding of things." In the city of caprice and fantasy there was no one who made less effort to submit to other rules. He concerned himself very little with historical or chronological exactitude of place, type, or costume, with the laws of perspective and architecture. Nor did he shrink from being absurd, as long as he was charming. Now

he is always charming, and nowhere more so than here, in this Villa Barbaro, where we can so well realise what the sumptuous summer residences of the rich Venetians were in the 16th century. Undoubtedly, there was a certain amount of bad taste and ostentation. These merchant princes were all the more eager to display their wealth because it was newly acquired. To these parvenu traders art was an external manifestation, a visible sign of their wealth. I do not propose in this connection to draw once more the facile, and, too often, exaggerated parallel between the sensuality of Venetian and the idealism of Florentine art ; but it is obvious that in the city of the lagoons, the city of perpetual festivals, painters and sculptors were intent, not on elevating the soul, but on delighting the senses, and making daily life lovelier and pleasanter. Though it has become commonplace, the comparison is apt : Venice, an indolent courtesan, has the languors and the love of glitter of Eastern women. Living in isolation upon her islands, she was not infected by the mystical crisis which agitated the whole peninsula. Dealing always with practical things, her uninterrupted commerce with Byzantium and Islam had made her sceptical and voluptuous. Hence, in comparison with the other Italian schools, she is poor in religious pictures ; and too often in those she has given us faith is conspicuously absent. Sacred subjects are mere pretexts for exuberant fancy. In the Gospel Veronese found mainly opportunities for painting banquets. But what was religion to the city of pleasure, of all the pleasures ? Merely a factor which gave intensity to the joy of living by evoking the fragility of life, inflicting a slight agitation, a fleeting emotion which barely ruffled the soul, leaving less trace on it than the passage of a gondola on the rippling waters.

## CHAPTER VI

### FANZOLO

THE Villa Maser is too magnificent and pretentious for my taste. I prefer the Villa Emo, which is further South at Fanzolo, in the Trevisan plain. I like it because it is less well known and little visited, and above all, because it has always belonged to the same family, by whom it has been piously and intelligently kept up. The fact that it has never changed the name of its owner, from the time of Leonardo Emo, a patrician of the Republic in the middle of the 16th century, to that of the present Count Emo, who welcomes you with the exquisite grace of the great noble, gives it a special intimacy and amenity. There is no solemnity about this dwelling, set in bowers of the freshest greenery, and I cannot imagine any country house where the inhabitants could live in more artistic surroundings and at the same time so close to nature. There is neither trim garden nor park around the house, but a belt of woods, fields and lawns, the tall grasses of which breathe perfumes.

Palladio was the architect here as at Maser. The great Vicenzan scattered his works throughout the whole region; if they could all be brought together, they would, as Vasari said, make a veritable city. The plan is the same as at Maser: a square central building, flanked by two long lower wings, faced with colonnaded porticoes, which, according to the architect, "would permit the owner to move about on his business under shelter, undeterred by the heat of the sun or the rain, while at the same time they would also add to the appearance of the building." The arrangement of the *palazzo* is



extremely simple ; in the middle there is a *loggia* on the façade, and behind it, a vestibule leading to the reception-room ; on each side, left and right, are rooms corresponding to the four angles. The decoration consists of simulated architecture and paintings which, here again, are a curious medley of religious subjects and pagan scenes ; hence the rooms are called those of *Venus*, the *Holy Family*, *Hercules* and the *Ecce Homo*, in reference to the principal fresco in each. The central part is the most perfect : the fine *loggia*, where a dignified Ceres receives you, as is fitting in this rural retreat ; the vestibule, the ceiling of which is adorned with the foliage of a magnificent vine ; and above all, the great saloon, a room of most harmonious proportions, decorated throughout with simulated columns, niches and statues. Here are the two best works : the *Death of Virginia* and the *Continence of Scipio Africanus*. They are undoubtedly by Zelotti ; but may not Veronese have collaborated with him to a certain extent ? Did he merely give general directions or did he himself paint some fragments ? The question will be debated indefinitely, no doubt. I myself think that Veronese had something to do with these frescoes. The argument that they are not equal to those in the Villa Barbaro proves nothing, for they were painted fifteen years earlier, at a time when the youthful Paolo Caliari, under the direct influence of the masters of Verona, was still seeking his way, before Titian and the great Venetians had been revealed to him. It seems to me probable that he composed and designed the most important subjects, leaving Zelotti to finish the work alone ; Zelotti was, indeed, a colourist of repute, whom Vasari pronounced superior to Veronese in the art of fresco. The majority of these paintings are careless and look as if they had been hurriedly executed ; the draperies

are heavy and the faces inexpressive. The little religious scenes alone are more finished ; I remember an *Ecce Homo* and a *Jesus as the Gardener* very admirably composed. On the other hand, the mythological subjects are nearly all treated carelessly and as simple sketches. But why insist on details when the general effect is charming in its exquisite blond tones ? How futile these questions of attribution and criticism seem in these rooms, the supreme decoration of which is the exquisite landscape which enters them by wide bays ! The view extends over vast meadows gemmed with flowers, interrupted only by groves of trees and the long lines of poplars marking out splendid avenues, which lose themselves in the plain. The rooms are full of the pleasant smell of grass and ripe fruit. In the distance, in the dusty golden air, lie the blue mountains, the hills of Asolo, and the Alps of Cadore. Nowhere is this constant intermingling of art and nature more delightful. Truly, the Venetians were the most voluptuous of men. And little given as I am to envy, I envied the happy owner of this dwelling, who, without quitting his treasure-house, may live among all the graces of Virgilian poetry throughout the year, witnessing the life of the fields, seed-time, harvest and vintage. I went away regretfully at dusk from this villa where the nights must be so beautiful, and where, closing one's eyes on the pearly carnations of Venus, one may fall asleep amidst the scents of new-mown hay.

## CHAPTER VII

## FUSINA

SHORES of the Brenta, Euganean Hills, how long I have been dreaming of you and hoping to know you ! So great is the magic of words to me that I loved to evoke you, merely for the pleasure of repeating the liquid syllables of your beautiful names ! Often, returning from the islands of the lagoon and re-entering Venice as it lay ablaze in the September sunset, I regretted that I could not make my way further along the river, to those blue mountains standing out in the light, softly rounded as young breasts.

Literary memories sharpened my desire rather than Baedeker, who devotes but a few lines to this region. I thought of Petrarch ending his days in the little house at Arquà, of Byron riding along the banks of the Brenta or on the hillsides of Este, of the heroes of *Il Fuoco* pursuing each other in the labyrinth of Strà. I remembered Barrès' advice : " Do not miss an opportunity of going up the Brenta on one of those slow vessels which are the only ones that still ply between Fusina and Padua. In warm brilliant autumn weather, how delightful it is on this old deserted waterway, where no letter from France can reach us ! " And, moreover, whenever I went through Padua, I was haunted by these verses of Musset's, which are far from being among his best :—

Padoue est un fort bel endroit  
Où de très grands docteurs en droit  
Ont fait merveille,



## SHORES OF THE BRENTA 197

Mais j'aime mieux la polenta  
Qu'on mange aux bords de la Brenta  
Sous une treille.<sup>1</sup>

This year I have at last been able to realise my dream. I did not eat polenta under a vine-arbour, but I followed the course of the Brenta at my ease, sometimes in boats, sometimes sauntering along the banks on foot. And, at first, I was disappointed.

It is at Fusina that those shores begin, the fame of which was so extraordinary that their scenery has been compared to the greatest wonders of the world. "I do not believe," says Lalande, "that the beauties of Tempe, so lauded by the ancient poets, or the suburbs of Daphne (to the South of Antioch), of which we have heard so much, can have been more beautiful than the Bay of Naples and the shores of the Brenta." Such praises seem strangely exaggerated to-day, for what we see is but a pale reflection of the ancient splendour of these shores at the time when they were visited in a *burchiello*. This, says Lalande, "was a large bark, the cabin generally adorned with paintings, carpets, mirrors and glass doors; it was towed by one or two four-oared boats from Venice to Fusina, along the lagoons where the course is marked out by posts, that the vessels may not lose their way or ground upon sand-banks. It takes about an hour to go from Venice to the mainland, that is to say, a distance of five miles; then two horses draw the boat along the canal of the Brenta. After entering this canal, one passes a double file of villages and houses following each other uninterruptedly, splendid palaces, gay little cots, endless gardens, luxuriant verdure; I have never seen shores so radiant or

<sup>1</sup> Padua is a fine city, where very learned doctors of the law have worked marvels; but more to my taste is the polenta one eats on the banks of the Brenta under a vine-arbour.

so populous." Some twenty years later, President de Brosse also extolled his *burchiello*, which was called the *Bucentaur*. "As you may suppose," he says, "it is but a very little child of the great *Bucentaur*; but then it is the prettiest child in the world, a very handsome likeness of our water diligences, and much cleaner. It contains a little ante-room for servants giving access to a room hung with Venetian brocatelle, with a table, and two seats covered with Morocco leather, eight practicable windows and two glazed doors. We found our lodging so comfortable and so pleasant that, contrary to our habit, we were in no haste to reach our destination, the less so as we were well provided with food, Canary wine, etc., and as the banks are bordered by many beautiful houses belonging to the Venetian nobles." Naturally, under such conditions, the way cannot have seemed very long. How delightful it must have been to travel thus slowly and comfortably in one of the loveliest countries in the world and with the most charming boon companions imaginable! As soon as night fell, the vessel was moored; the company dined at a villa, or, failing this, improvised a feast on board. They danced and sang and gambled till morning. Intrigues began and were broken off. The smallest incident had a delicious picturesqueness.

At no period was the delight of life greater or more passionately cultivated than during the Venetian 18th century. We must read the memoirs of the day to get an idea of the incessant festivities that followed one upon the other on these shores where over a hundred and fifty villas had been built. Life in these was as luxurious and even freer than in Venice. The Venetians did not go to the country to rest and enjoy rural pleasures, but to amuse themselves, to pass from diversion to diversion, from folly to folly, and also to dazzle their

neighbours. Their mentality was not unlike that of the Parisians of to-day, who can devise no better form of amusement than to reassemble at Cabourg or Trouville, on the same boards and in the same casinos. Snobbery is of all time ; only the word is modern. It was essential to have a villa on the banks of the Brenta, just as it is now to have one on the unattractive, characterless coast of Calvados.

Since the beginning of last century the calm waters of the river no longer reflect the lights of boats, or echo the songs of Pergolesi and Cimarosa. Mournful Fusina no longer sees the gaily beflagged *burchielli* ; only barges laden with fruit make their way every morning to the Venetian markets. Candide would seek the Signor Pococurante in vain on these deserted shores, and Corinne would not retire to a villa here on the departure of Oswald. It was Napoleon who dealt the first blow at the prosperity of the Republic ; the Austrian occupation completed its ruin. Even in 1833, when Chateaubriand revisited them, the shores were no longer so inviting, and many villas had disappeared ; however, in spite of this partial disappointment, he was delighted with the " mulberry, orange and fig-trees and the sweetness of the air " ; it is true that he had come back from " the pine forests of Germany and from the Czech mountains, where the sun has an evil face."

The decadence has continued. When, after passing the pink walls of San Giorgio in Alga, where a little marble Madonna watches over the lagoon, I landed on the shores of flat, marshy Fusina, a haunt of fever and mosquitoes, I had a sense of mortal depression. It was formerly an important village. Deep wells had been sunk here whence came the drinking-water which was carried every day to Venice in specially constructed barges. A curious mechanism, the *Carro*, by the help



of ropes and pulley, used to hoist boats over the bar which closed the mouth of the Brenta, before its course had been partially deflected towards the South. Now there is nothing but the custom-house, the little electric-tramway station, and a few miserable houses half imbedded in the mud. The melancholy of it all might move one to tears. Where is the old Fusina whose charm was praised by travellers, the Fusina set between ponds and the lagoon, in the midst of flowers and verdure, of water lilies and irises ? Around me I see nothing but the mournful fields invaded by an immense vegetable decomposition. On this autumn morning the low plain, almost liquid and steaming with the decay of plants, looks like an ill-drained marsh. Little pools twinkle in the sun. But the scene changes quickly enough. A few farms give a touch of animation to the roadside. Boats slip along the canal, drawn by horses, or propelled by rowers ; others are moored against the banks, laden with brilliant fruits and ripe grapes. In the meadows flexible vines throw their garlands from one *pioppo* to another, swaying in the wind like golden and purple hammocks. Bright yellow houses are reflected in the turbid waters of the river which are barely stirred by the passing of the boats.

Once these waters ran freely, when the Brenta followed its natural course and fell into the sea at Fusina. But from the day when Venice subdued Padua, the constant care of the Republic was to deflect the course of the river, which silted up sand in the lagoon, and by means of canals to carry off the water and the earth it brought down with it to a considerable distance, towards Brondolo and Chioggia. The old bed, now canalised and controlled by locks, is at present a kind of long, narrow pool in which innumerable ducks dabble ; in certain corners it seems asleep under the vegetation that covers it.

Fortunately, the engineers did not attempt to rectify its incessant windings. At every bend the view changes. Often a double colonnade of tall golden poplars lines the banks. A premature autumn has followed a rainy summer, and the mulberry-trees are already yellow in the yellowing plain. Near the barns flames the vivid foliage of cherry-trees.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MALCONTENTA

AT a bend of the Brenta, the lofty mass of the Villa Foscari rises behind the roofs of Malcontenta, and we are surprised not to have seen it before, so majestically does it stand out above the motionless plain. The walls built by Palladio have preserved their air of dignified serenity so perfectly that the traveller who sees them as he passes on the opposite bank of the canal little suspects the ruins they shelter. The downfall of the Republic was followed by pillage of the most shameless kind. When its palaces were not entirely demolished, as they often were, all the artistic objects they contained were offered for sale; furniture, frescoes, woodwork and stuffs; then contractors for the breaking up of buildings bought wholesale at very low prices everything that still possessed any kind of value; stones, lead, ironwork, and decorative motives. It was a veritable *razzia*. Rarely has vandalism been carried so far.

The ground floor of the Villa Foscari is at present occupied by a cartwright's workshop. When I asked

one of the workmen if I could see the villa, he seemed surprised at my request, and declared there was nothing to see ; then, as I insisted, he showed me a little door and a tumbledown spiral staircase, which now gives access to the first floor. He did not condescend to accompany me. What, indeed, could a visitor carry off, seeing that the rooms are empty ?

Here, even more than in the Rotunda at Vicenza, or in any of the ruined palaces of Venice, one is struck with consternation by the impression of sudden, inexplicable decay. Standing in the large, cheerful, sunny rooms, with fine views of the surrounding country, it is difficult to understand their abandonment. Here and there on the walls it is possible to distinguish vestiges of the frescoes with which they were decorated by Battista Zelotti, perhaps under the direction of Veronese, as at Maser and Fanzolo. I come upon a simulated statue of a woman closely akin to one in the Villa Giacomelli. I look in vain for that *Fall of the Titans* which President de Brosses so greatly admired. What has become of these paintings ? Have they been removed piecemeal, or simply destroyed by time ? They have probably been destroyed, since a good many fragments still exist, and there is no trace in museums or private collections of the missing portions.

The entrance saloon must have been of noble proportions ; following the plan dear to Palladio, it occupied the entire depth of the building, extending from the main front on the Brenta to the façade overlooking the gardens. The present owner is planning its restoration, and certain works have in fact been begun ; but the ravages that will have to be repaired are very great. Among the other rooms two cabinets only have preserved their original decoration in fairly good condition ; and it is charming. Nowhere did the artists who



specialised in stucco and fresco acquire greater skill than in Venice. They had everything essential to such work : richness of invention, grace, variety, elegance, freshness of inspiration, and, above all, exquisite taste. Their fecundity was almost miraculous. Festoons and garlands, vine-branches, foliage and flowers, butterflies and ribbons run round doors and windows, undulate along the walls, and enframe alcoves. *Putti* and Cupids, charmingly modelled, enliven these motives with their thousand attitudes, unexpected, but always natural. Memories of the East and even of the Far East with which Venice was in constant intercourse add picturesque touches. Sometimes the walls were adorned with real landscapes. In one of the little cabinets, especially, there is a perfectly preserved ceiling ; a *Fame* with outspread wings flies surrounded by chubby children, animals, grotesques and emblems. The general effect is delightful. Anxious to take back a souvenir of my visit, I laid my Kodak upside down on the floor in more or less haphazard fashion, and as sometimes happens in photography, this picture, perhaps unique, and on which I had not reckoned, has proved the best I got during my journey.

The principal entrance was under the colonnade, which gives so much dignity to the façade. An inscription records the visit of Henri III of France, who, on receiving the news of the death of his brother, Charles IX, had quitted Cracow surreptitiously, eager to exchange a foreign crown for that of his fathers. Venice gave him a magnificent reception ; the chronicles that have come down to us bear witness to the splendour of the festivities which took place at the end of July, 1574, and are so detailed that we can follow the course of these from day to day, and almost from hour to hour ; this, in fact, has been done by M. Pierre de Nolhac and M. Angelo Solerti

in a very interesting Italian publication. An old friendship and mutual esteem united the Republic and the Most Christian King. At Venice, as at Vienna, the French Ambassador followed immediately after the Pope's Envoy, and the term *Ambasciatore*, without any affix, was used to designate the representative of France, as if there were no other. We can imagine the excitement caused by the arrival of Henri III; the incident of his flight from Cracow—the somewhat ridiculous circumstances of which were unknown—had invested him with a kind of halo of courage and audacity. All classes of society vied with each other in enthusiasm; the Ambassador Du Perrier was able to write to the King as follows: "In truth, Sire, I must tell you that there is not a man or woman in the town, of whatever condition they be, who is not anxious to honour you. Octogenarians and centenarians dread to die before seeing you." The Senate passed a series of exceptional measures; it decided to erect a triumphal arch at the Lido, where the King was to land, and commissioned Palladio to construct it, which he did in less than a month. Fortunately, two reproductions of the great architect's work have come down to us; one in the picture by Vicentino, which still adorns the Hall of the Four Doors in the Doge's Palace, the other in an engraving by Zenone at Padua University; the latter is of the highest value, for it enables us to distinguish the details and inscriptions on the arch. We even find noted on it the exact spot occupied by the magistrates and dignitaries of the Republic, on the arrival of the French Monarch.

Henri left Venice after ten days of festivity. The royal procession entered the Brenta, and stopped at the Foscari Palace, where dinner had been prepared. The last of the Valois admired, we are told, the *loggia*, the

double staircase leading up to it, and the shady groves surrounding the villa. Alas! those groves have disappeared. The park of the ancient domain has been transformed into fields and farms. There are neither gardens nor hornbeam avenues. The palace itself is now a mere annexe of the adjoining barn. The exterior of the building alone has remained almost intact. The high walls, to which the fine colonnade of the façade gives the aspect of an antique temple, seem to feel shame that they are still so noble only to shelter work shops and lofts; the air of death and melancholy would be less pronounced, I think, if their lines were half effaced by moss and vegetation, and not so clearly marked against the sky; if their silhouette had become vague and indefinite, like the inverted image we see in the turbid waters of the river.

## CHAPTER IX

### MIRA

AFTER Malcontenta, and almost as far as Mira, the majority of the villas are in ruins, and merely serve, like the Foscari *palazzo*, as agricultural dépôts. It cannot cost much nowadays to have a palace on the Brenta! The gardens still exist round many of the buildings, with their alleys of tall box-bushes and aged trees of rare species which bear witness to past splendour. On what were once the lawns—now ragged grass-plots, or vegetable patches—stand mutilated statues and columns surmounted by crumbling vases. Baskets of carved



fruit, glinting in the sunshine, are perched on tottering pedestals. Mosses, Virginian creeper and ivy have annexed the territory and bind the marbles in their flexible tendrils at will. Old age and solitude, so disastrous in their action on dwellings, give an appealing grace to these gardens ; the beginning of their death-agony is more evident to us than the patina of time, or the majesty of spreading boughs. We make their acquaintance at a moment when decay lends them a supreme attraction. Their dilapidation makes them doubly dear to us. We gaze at them tenderly as, by the bedside of one who is about to leave us, we look back with a bitter satisfaction on the joys we have shared with him, all the fairer because they are dead for ever.

These banks are peopled with statues. D'Annunzio's ardent imagination has hardly exaggerated their number in that page of *Il Fuoco*, where he sees them everywhere, in the midst of orchards, vines and silvery cabbages, vegetables and pastures, on dung-hills and on heaps of wine-lees, under stacks of straw and on the thresholds of cottages, " still white, or gray, or yellow with lichens, or green with mosses, or stained and speckled, in every attitude, with every gesture, Goddesses, Heroes, Nymphs, Seasons, Hours, with their bows, their arrows, their garlands, their torches, with all the emblems of power, wealth and pleasure, exiles from fountain, grotto, labyrinth, arbour and portico, comrades of evergreen, box and myrtle, protectors of fugitive loves, witnesses of eternal vows, figures of a dream far older than the hands that fashioned them and the eyes that rested on them in the devastated gardens."

What changes a century has wrought ! What irony there is in the wide avenues where no one walks, in the festal halls where no one dances. How hospitable is the sweep of those grand steps and entries ! *Pax intransitibus*

(Peace to all who enter) we still read on a façade as we approach Mira, where there are a few villas in better preservation. Two at least among them deserve a visit, were it only for the memories they evoke.

The first is the villa built for Federigo Contarini, Procurator of San Marco. It is often called the Palace of the Lions, because two stone lions guard the entrance, on either side of the avenue of plane-trees. Henri III made a second and last halt on the banks of the Brenta at this point. The inscription which records the event sums up the unanimous welcome he received in a happy formula : *tota fere Italia comitante*. Frescoes by Tiepolo, now in the André Collection, once adorned the reception-room ; the commission for them had been given to the painter by the Pisani, the heirs of the Contarini. The most important commemorates the visit of the King of France ; but the painter was not deeply concerned with accuracy in his record. It is evident that he was content to copy Vicentino's portrait of the Valois ; and it seems curious that for the background he should not even have troubled to reproduce the landscape and the palace from nature. But from the decorative point of view the work is admirable, and the scene imagined by the painter is full of dash and gallantry. Henri III ascends the steps to a terrace, followed by a long train of French and Polish gentlemen, pages, guards and dwarfs ; the aged Contarini, robed in a toga and surrounded by senators and patricians, bows low before the youthful sovereign.

The other villa at Mira which I wanted to see was the Ferrigli palace, formerly the property of the Foscarini. It is not very remarkable in appearance, and no longer can one even evoke the amorous figure of that Antonio Foscarini, who is said to have suffered capital punishment rather than compromise the honour of a

woman. The law of the Republic punished by death any citizen who should enter the house of a foreign diplomatist by night, and the story goes that one evening the son of the Doge, surprised in the chamber of a Venetian lady, had been obliged to leap from the window on to a neighbouring balcony, which happened to be that of the Spanish Embassy. It has since been proved that love had nothing to do with the affair. The condemnation of Antonio Foscarini for secret negotiations is none the less painful, for, after the execution of the sentence, his innocence was recognised, and solemnly proclaimed by the Council of Ten.

Though we must abandon this legend, the palace has authentic memories of Byron, who rented it in 1817 for his mistress, Marianna, when she was suffering from fever. It was at Mira, too, that he made the acquaintance of a daughter of the people, Margarita Cogni, whom he christened *La Fornarina*. And it was to this same villa that he returned a few weeks later with the Countess Guiccioli, for whom the doctors had recommended country air. This is the room where he wrote the admirable Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Perhaps these months at Mira were among the happiest and calmest of his life! Poor Byron! His existence was an alternation of noble desires and vile realities, of cynicism and tenderness, of enthusiasm and disgust. Like that vessel of Murano enclosed in a glass bubble which seems to lack the strength to break the frail barrier that holds it motionless, the least obstacle seemed to paralyse his audacious energies. It was after his most ardent efforts to free himself from the mud into which he was sinking that he fell most lamentably, and into excesses unworthy of his genius. I know not why, but I thought of him the other day, when reading over the *Lettre à Fontanes* in which Chateaubriand speaks



of the Tiber, which owes its yellow colour to the rains that fall in the mountains whence it descends : " Often," he says, " watching its discoloured waters, in the serenest weather, I thought of a life begun in the midst of tempest ; it is in vain that the rest of its course is under a clear sky ; the river will always be stained with the waters of the storm that troubled it at its source." Nearly the whole of Byron's life was spent in agitation, and I can understand the deep impression made on him by an inscription he read on a tomb in the Certosa of Ferrara : *Implora pace*. " Here we have everything," he writes in a letter, " impotence, contrite hope, humility. . . . I hope that he who survives me, whoever he may be, and sees me carried to the foreign corner in the cemetery of the Lido, will have those words and no others graven on my stone." Byron's wish was not granted. He does not slumber on the shores of the lagoon, by the sea that had so often bathed his beautiful body. And neither his memory nor his works inspire that peace he implored. His verses still breathe heroism. Merely from evoking his memory one day in Venice, Mickiewicz felt a revival of those noble ardours which had been for a while dulled by the calm of Weimar, the counsellor of egotism. No personality is more exciting than that of Byron. But can we evoke him to-day on the crowded shores of the Lido, for ever Germanised and disfigured ? It is on the lonely banks of the Brenta, on autumn evenings ablaze with blood and gold, and, above all, in that villa where the phantoms of some of his loves still linger, that we may encounter the sorrowful shade of the poet of *Don Juan*.

## CHAPTER X

## STRÀ

FROM Mira to Strà, the palaces follow one after the other almost uninterruptedly along the Brenta, which flows at the foot of their walls, or under the trees of their parks. The persistent scent of box, at once harsh and honeyed, floats over the tranquil water. Above the gateways, statues keep their indifferent watch. And if decay is less apparent here, there is also a falling off in picturesqueness. The faults of taste are numerous, both in the restorations and in the modern buildings that have been stuck on to the old ones. A few of the villas still belong to the descendants of old families of the Republic ; but a great many have passed into the hands of the rich traders of Venice, or Padua. Both, however, have renounced the luxury of former days ; the nobles who turn out of their palaces on the Grand Canal to let them to foreigners, and the merchants who are piling up fortunes alike live quietly and try to turn the adjacent lands to account.

Very soon after passing Dolo and the red walls of the Villa Barbariga, we see the dense thickets and the lofty silhouette of the palace of Strà, the most modern, the most important and the best preserved of all those which were raised upon these shores. It was built for the Pisani, who wanted a splendid dwelling which should attest their wealth. As they could not procure sufficient space in Venice, they had it built on the site of their country-house at Strà. They applied to Frigimelica, who had restored their palace on the Grand Canal, but his plans were modified by Francesco Maria Preti,

who directed the works. The building was completed in 1735, just when Alvise Pisani was elected Doge.

The size and splendour of Strà made it a fit abode for sovereigns only. In 1807, Napoleon I bought it for nearly a million francs for Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy. At the fall of the French Empire it became the property of the Austrian Hapsburgs, who often inhabited it, and kept it up carefully. The Empress Maria-Anna was especially fond of it, as was also the unfortunate Maximilian, the young blue-eyed Archduke, to whom Napoleon III wanted to give Venetia at Villafranca, and whose life ended so tragically in Mexico. In the long inscription on a marble tablet at the entrance of the vestibule, which gives the history of the villa in detail, I notice how skilfully the memories of from 1815 to 1865 have been veiled in a vague formula ; *abitata da sovrani e da principi*.<sup>1</sup>

And yet this half-century was the most brilliant period of Strà. After the reunion of Venetia to the Kingdom of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele II spent very little time there. To-day the palace, stripped of some of its works of art, and of its furniture, which was taken to Monza, is merely an expensive national monument, of which the Italian Government has often tried to dispose. But, fortunately, a clause in the sale contract forbids the cutting up of the estate. In spite of the absurd price at which it has been offered (less than 200,000 francs, I have been told) Strà still belongs to the State. Strange that this princely dwelling has not tempted some American millionaire with a taste for historic memories !

A vast ill-kept meadow lies in front of the palace and shows up the imposing façade. We feel that Alvise Pisani had brought back a taste for sumptuous buildings

<sup>1</sup> Inhabited by sovereigns and princes.



from his embassy to the Court of France. The spectator cannot but recall Versailles in the presence of such an accumulation of colonnades, pilasters and caryatides. The whole is somewhat composite as architecture, but powerful in effect; the amplitude of the lines masks the heterogeneous style very skilfully. The solemnity of the entrance harmonises with the majesty of the façade. The immense vestibule extends to the further end of the palace, intersected by the massive columns which support the ball-room. There is consequently no room of any interest on the ground floor. In short, this huge building has only a single storey. But this is perfectly arranged. The place is remarkably simple. In the centre is the reception-room, and the two inner courts which light it from the sides; all around is a wide corridor into which open the rooms that are lighted from without on the four sides of the palace; I do not know the exact number of these, but there are over a hundred. Seeing them is rather a wearisome business, as the visitor is shepherded by a custodian—amusing enough for the first quarter of an hour—who is still awe-struck at the thought of all the crowned heads who have sojourned here. He points out, with great respect, the billiard-table on which the sovereigns of three countries played. The bed in which Napoleon slept is the object of his special veneration. On the other hand, the worthy fellow is less deferential in the rooms that sheltered the secret amours of *Il Rè Galantuomo*, or of Maria Luisa Teresa of Parma, the old Queen of Spain, and mistress of Godoy. There are few works of art, and I saw only one really interesting room, that in which the Council of Ten used to meet in the time of Alvise Pisani. The walls are decorated with marble medallions representing the members of the Doge's family and his suite. The place of honour was

given to a very fine bust of a woman, Pisani's nurse ; this old peasant's head is admirably realistic with its strongly marked features and the high cheek bones under the wrinkled skin.

The central saloon is one of the most magnificent I have ever seen. The ceiling is irradiated by a Tiepolo, the date of which is fixed by a letter of December, 1761. In it the artist speaks of finishing " the great hall of the Pisani palace " before setting out for Spain. The work was therefore one of the last executed by Tiepolo in Italy, at the very zenith of his powers. Commissioned to glorify the most illustrious of the Pisani, the artist has painted them surrounded by the attributes of Peace and Abundance. Venice, in the guise of a queen wearing a battlemented crown and holding a sceptre surmounted by a cross, advances towards them. Above hovers the Virgin in a circle formed by Faith, Hope, Wisdom and Charity. In the centre of the ceiling a Fame, audaciously foreshortened, flies through the free spaces of the air. I was unable to make out the exact significance of the other figures. But the general effect is prodigious, and, in the words of Signor Molmenti, " it is one of the happiest visions of art that ever enchanted the senses."

Nature alone can charm the eye after such radiance as this, and the park is worthy of the villa. Here, again, there are echoes of Versailles. A long central avenue with lawns and ornamental waters leads to the former stables, an imposing building, almost a palace, now allocated to an institute of hydrology. On every side alleys branch off in various directions, leading either to a gate, an archway, or a belvedere ; and each of these is remarkable for its architectural decoration. Under the trees, too, there are innumerable statues, porticoes, vases and pavilions. Here, as in the fields around the Brenta, all the gods and goddesses of mythology are

represented. A little more simplicity would be a relief ; there is a certain bad taste in all this decorative luxuriance. In thickets of box and hornbeam a labyrinth circles in bewildering curves round a little tower surmounted by the figure of a warrior. I pushed open the rusty gate between two pilasters supporting Cupids astride dolphins which gives access to it. And it amused me to wander in the treacherous alleys which d'Annunzio made the scene of Stelio d' Effrena's cruel pranks.

## CHAPTER XI

## MONSELICE

AFTER leaving the villages of Strà and Ponte di Brenta, where we cross the muddy river, we enter the rich Paduan plain. The road is shaded by a double row of plane-trees, the russet leaves of which burn in the sunshine. Scented vapours float in the light air. Virginian creeper, heavy clusters of wisteria, and red roses hang over the walls. Never have I felt the poignant sweetness of autumn more keenly, and Le Cardonnell's verses rise to my lips :—

Dans sa limpidité la lumière d'octobre  
S'épandant de l'azur, emplît l'air allégé ;  
Elle baigne d'un or harmonieux et sobre  
Les champs où l'on a vendangé.<sup>1</sup>

The environs of Padua are delightful. "If we did not know," said the Emperor Constantine Palæologus,

<sup>1</sup> The limpid light of October, spreading from the azure, fills the clear air, and floods the fields where the grapes have been gathered with sober, harmonious gold.



“that the earthly Paradise was in Asia, I should believe that it must have been in the territory of Padua.” I am struck more especially by the change in the aspect of everything only a few leagues from Venice. Climate, landscape, sky and inhabitants are all quite different. The light, above all, is of another quality. It is not full of colour and vapour as on the lagoon, but vivid and piercing. Forms stand out in strong relief. The lines of the Euganean Hills, so soft and blurred as seen from Venice, are so precise and definite here that they almost hurt the eyes. And merely walking along this road enables me to realise why the vision of the Paduan painters differs so essentially from that of the Venetians with whom they were long classed. The School of Padua is far more akin to that of Florence, whence, indeed, came the two great masters of the 14th and 15th centuries whose influence was to be so decisive here. Giotto and Donatello did not feel themselves strangers on the banks of the Bacchiglione, and they were at once understood and imitated. Nothing could be more alien to the art of Titian than the somewhat hard dry manner of Squarcione and Mantegna.

On leaving Padua, the Ferrara road runs parallel with the Battaglia canal. To the left is a vast plain, formerly marshy, but now drained and watered by an elaborate system of canals, a veritable garden of riotous fertility, where the roads disappear under verdure. To the right are the Euganean Hills, a little volcanic chain rising abruptly from the plain, and quite independent both of the spurs of the Veronese Alps and of the Apennines. Their extinct craters are fantastically shaped, but always harmonious, as Chateaubriand, who delighted in this region, has noted. “This road to Monselice,” he says, “is charming: hills most graceful in outline, orchards of fig and mulberry, and willows festooned with

vines . . . The Euganean Mountains shone golden in the setting sun with an agreeable variety of forms and great purity of lines ; one of these hills is like the chief pyramid of Sakkarah, when it stands out against the Libyan horizon at sunset." He is fired by the thought that he is passing through one of the places of the earth richest in poets and men of letters. He quotes Livy, Virgil, Catullus, Ariosto, Tasso, Petrarch and others pell-mell. As a fact, I can think of but two literary incidents which are truly local : the birth of Livy at Abano, and the death of Petrarch in the little village of Arquà.

The whole country is rich in thermal springs. The Euganean craters no longer pour out lava ; but the waters that flow so abundantly from the trachyte bear witness to the continued activity of subterranean fires. The meadows are intersected by streams of hot water that give off heavy vapours. One of the amusements of those who come to take the waters is to boil eggs in the springs where the temperature of the water is very high. The springs of Abano, moreover, boast of an almost fabulous past, for Hercules is said to have rested here from his labours, whence the origin of Abano, a place of rest, *ἀπνοος*. Here too Cornelius had the prophetic vision which enabled him to predict the victory of Pharsalia. What is at least certain is that in the 4th century Claudian wrote an enthusiastic and pompous eulogy of the baths.

After Battaglia, embowered in verdure, the road again skirts the hills dominated by Monte Verda, which is over 1,800 feet high ; and very soon we are at Monselice. The town lies between the canal, the Rocca rising steeply above, and the old battlemented walls still in fair preservation here and there. It looks so constricted the spectator feels he might almost grasp it in his hand as S. Barbara grasps her tower. It is a little old town

which was of some importance before the Roman domination ; relics of the Stone Age have been discovered here, and many flint objects have been found at La Rocca, whence the name : *Mons Silicis*. On this precipitous rock there are still vestiges of the fortifications raised by Ezzelino, the famous tyrant of Padua. The view of the hill is most picturesque, especially when one comes on it by the Padua road. A line of cypresses towers skyward, barring the horizon, and a single parasol pine among them has an extraordinary value against the deep blue of the atmosphere. At Monselice there are several churches, a mediæval castle with red ivy-clad walls, and above all, on the flank of the Rocca, a famous shrine consisting of seven chapels. The general effect of the constructions with their terraces, flights of steps, and trees, is very curious. The chapels are said to have been designed by Scamozzi, and decorated by Palma the Younger ; unfortunately, the dilapidation of the paintings makes it impossible to form an opinion. Moreover, I did not come here in search of artistic impressions. On this fine autumn afternoon I prefer to climb up to the wood which crowns the hill. The delicate foliage of the pines filters the rays of the sinking sun, and between the resinous trunks there are views in every direction. To the north, behind the thickets of Battaglia and Abano, the towers and domes of Padua are outlined ; to the south, the great valleys of the Po and the Adige, striped with a multitude of roads and canals, faint into the vapour that rises from the damp earth. To the west the eye takes in a portion of the Euganean Hills, studded with villages, “ rosy as the shells one finds by myriads on their soil,” to quote d’Annunzio. To the east the Venetian plain stretches away as far as Chioggia, which is visible in clear weather.



## CHAPTER XII

## ESTE

Fra l'Adige e la Brenta a pie' de' colli  
 ch'al troiano Antenor piacquero tanto  
 con le sulfuree vene e rivi molli,  
 con lieti solchi e prati ameni accanto. . . .<sup>1</sup>

THUS did Ariosto sing the happy position of Este, at the foot of the last of the Euganean Hills, between the Adige and the Brenta. Why is this city, which seems to keep something of the glory of its past greatness, so neglected by travellers? The Guides scarcely mention it, and Burckhardt would not go out of his way to see its art-treasures. Almost on the road between Padua and Ferrara, tourists pass it by, although it offers them some noble memories, a most attractive aspect, a few good pictures, and a collection of antiquities perfectly arranged in a very modern museum. Older than Rome, it claims to have been founded by Ateste after the taking of Troy, the while his comrade Antenor was founding Padua. One of its historians declares it to be so ancient and so famous that it need envy no other city in the world. He exaggerates; but we must admit that in the Roman period it had an importance due to the artistic wealth hidden beneath its soil, and that in more modern times it was the cradle of one of the most illustrious

<sup>1</sup> Between the Adige and the Brenta at the foot of those hills which delighted the Trojan Antenor with their veins of sulphur and gentle slopes; with joyous furrow and pleasant meadows beside them.

families of Italy, whose blood still flows in the veins of the royal houses of England and Austria-Hungary. The Estes reached the summit of their glory in the 13th century, in the person of the terrible Obizzo, the tyrant whom Dante shows us strangled by his own son :

Ch' è biondo  
è Obizzo da Esti, il qual per vero  
fu spenta dal figliastro su nel mondo.<sup>1</sup>

Although it has long declined from its former state, Este has retained its grand air. Its avenues are wide and well kept, and bordered by arcaded houses nearly all differing in arrangement and decoration. Its central square has a dignified appearance with its palaces, the town-hall, the law-courts, and the state pawn-shop. In the centre there is a tall flagstaff supported by four lions in the Venetian manner. Gates flanked by turrets command the entrances to the town. At the end of the streets the horizon is shut off, here by the green slopes of sunny hills, studded with villas, gardens, vineyards and olive-yards, there by the walls of the castle built in the 14th century by Ubertino of Carrara. Few ruins are more evocative than these fragmentary structures of red brick overgrown with ivy. Stacks of straw lean against the old towers on which in spring-time the almond-trees drop a litter of rosy petals. Flowers grow in the cracks of the masonry, adding their poetry to the melancholy of things ; an exiled poppy or a rose-bush against a rampart is often lovelier than a skilfully arranged flower-bed.

The basilica of Santa Tecla stands close beside the castle. Its origin is lost in the mists of antiquity, and the history of its Chapter is one of the most glorious

<sup>1</sup> . . . that fair one is Obizzo of Este, he who was destroyed by his evil step-son in the world above.

of Italian chronicles. The present building dates only from the 18th century ; that which preceded it was destroyed by an earthquake on a certain Palm Sunday at the very moment, says tradition, when the priest was reading the Gospel words ; *terra mota est*. It seems that the church and its clergy still enjoy special honours and privileges ; but to me, its chief title to glory is the Tiepolo in the choir, where it was placed in 1757, and has remained to this day. It is one of the painter's master-pieces, and, perhaps, his best picture in oils. With the splendours of the ceiling at Strà fresh in my mind, I cannot but admire once more the variety of the marvellous decorator. Just as the fresco is brilliant and luminous, so here the canvas has the gray, subdued tonality suitable to the subject : *S. Thecla delivering Este from the plague*. This large canvas—about 21 feet by 12 feet—suggests certain modern works in its dramatic intensity. Against the background of clouds which lower ominously over the stricken city, the saint stands out in vigorous relief. God appears in the sky and drives away the demon of Plague, a boldly foreshortened apparition. In the foreground, among a group of the dying, a weeping child clasps the body of his expiring mother. Behind, Este appears with its towers and the two pointed mountains which close the horizon so picturesquely. Here, again, I agree with Signor Molmenti's opinion : " Everything is admirable in this composition : the grandeur of the design, the wonderful effect of relief, the variety of the attitudes, the expression of the faces, and the science of the foreshortening."

Not far from the ruins of the Castle and the church, on the hill against which Este leans, is the villa Byron took in 1817, and lent the following year to his friend Shelley. An inscription records the double memory : *Giorgio, Lord Byron, nel 1817 e 1818 dimorò in questa villa ;*



*ebbe hospite Shelley e qui scriveva spaziando per la natura e il castello con ala immensa di fantasia.*<sup>1</sup>

The view is most beautiful, and I can understand how it must have enchanted romantic eyes. "Behind us," writes Shelley in a letter, "are the Euganean Hills . . . At the end of our garden is an extensive Gothic castle, now the habitation of owls and bats. . . . We see before us the wide flat plain of Lombardy, in which we see the sun and moon rise and set, and the evening star, and all the golden magnificence of autumnal clouds. . . ." I, too, wandered dreaming in these gardens, where the passionate hearts of those young Englishmen once throbbed. The light is failing, and I have not seen Cima's *Madonna*, nor the fine *Medusa* in the Museum. But what of that! It was here that Shelley wrote the *Lines written in the Euganean Hills*. The panorama is unchanged, save that the railway now cuts across the plain. But the outline of the old walls is the same, and already the bats are beginning their blundering flight. This is the hour dear to lovers, the twilight hour when hand seeks hand. Ah! let us drink in its sweetness a little longer! Before descending to the town, let us watch the golden splendour of the autumn clouds dying on the horizon, as on so many bygone evenings.

<sup>1</sup> George, Lord Byron, lived in this villa in 1817 and 1818; here Shelley was his guest, and here he wrote, with vast flights of imagination, wandering between the castle and nature.

## CHAPTER XIII

## ARQUÀ

IF I had not long been accustomed to Italian *vetturini*, I should never have embarked at Este in the strange landau which must have come out of the museum of antiquities. I know, of course, that these gaunt horses, which seem already tired before they start, end by covering considerable distances; but really, to-day, my driver carries his system rather too far. We fall into a walk when the ground rises, of course; then, again, when it is level, to let the horse get his wind; and, thirdly, when it descends, that he may not slip. But I accept all this with a good grace. In the first place, I know that the road is bad, and cut out of the rock in rather primitive fashion. And then, the day promises to be so fine, the air is so pure and luminous, the sun so pleasant that I am in no sort of hurry to arrive. Once more I am rejoicing in those Italian hours when, free from care, and far from the too frequented roads, I am able to taste the delight of life. Everything is smiling around me, the fertile country, the golden vines, the people at the farm-doors, the children playing in the ditches. And dipping into a local guide-book, I read a page of Luigi Cornaro, who, as long ago as the 15th century, celebrated the joy of this district which he called the land *dell' allegrezza e del riso* (of joy and laughter).

At Baone the road makes a great *détour* and offers a splendid view of Este; then at the intersection of the Monselice road, it turns sharply towards the north and makes for Arquà, the houses of which now become

visible. An old belfry stands out against the sky in a nest of verdure. Above rises the amphitheatre of the Euganean Hills, now rounded like the balloon-like Vosges, now pointed and regular as pyramids. Certain truncated cones recalling the mountains of Auvergne, explain the comparison which came naturally to M. Pierre de Nolhac's mind when he made this same pilgrimage :—

Ma Limagne courbe des lignes  
Pareilles sur ses horizons ;  
Les collines sont moins insignes,  
Mais elle y mêle aussi les vignes  
Et les profondes frondaisons . . .<sup>1</sup>

Strange and mighty magic of Italy, whose hold on our beauty-loving souls is so strong that we delight to discover some of its aspects in the corners of France dearest to us !

Before reaching Arquà we cross a marshy plain, no doubt the bed of a dried up lake. White oxen, yoked in six, eight and even ten pairs, as I saw them in the neighbourhood of Ferrara, are ploughing a rich soil, which turns over in clods of intense black under the ploughshare, making a violent contrast with the light green of the willows that fringe the road. Then the blue mountains draw nearer. The road rises in a sunny circus, where luxuriant vines mingle with figs and olives. In the gardens laurels, magnolias, camellias and pomegranates grow strongly and vigorously in the open air. At the foot of Monte Ventolone, which protects them against the cold winds, the hills open out in the shape of a bow ; perhaps this is the origin of the name Arquà. The rise is so steep that I get out of the carriage, just by

<sup>1</sup> My Limagne curves in lines like these on its horizons ; the hills are less notable, but vines and dense foliage mingle there as here.



the fountain Petrarch caused to be built, as the inscription tells us :

Fonti Numen adest ; lymphas, pius hospes, adora  
Unde bibens cecinit digna Petrarcha Deo.<sup>1</sup>

The village on the hill-top does not possess a spring, and even to-day depends upon this one fountain. The peasant-women come to draw water in buckets of every shape which they carry hanging from the two ends of a long curved branch, after the ancient custom which still prevails nearly everywhere in Italy.

I must confess that I was not unmoved on entering the poet's village ; but I did not expect to be with him so quickly. A few paces brought me to the tomb in which, six years after his death, he was laid by his son-in-law, Francesco di Brossano. How impressive is this space in front of the poor flat façade of the church, with the simple sarcophagus of red marble resting on four columns ! From the edge of the terrace the view extends over the houses of the village and the landscape. From a garden below the level of the square two huge cypresses shoot aloft to watch, silent and motionless, over the tomb. Below the bronze bust, which was let into the stone in the 16th century, there is an epitaph which states that this tomb contains the bones of Petrarch. However, they are not complete, for on May 27th, 1630, a Dominican of Portogruaro broke off an angle of the tomb, and succeeded in abstracting an arm. Was it in order to present it to Florence, as has been said ? Perhaps, for it is quite certain that all Italy envied the glory of Arquà. Boccaccio praised the village for having preserved the bones of the illustrious old man, and blamed Florence who had been unable to retain her son. " As

<sup>1</sup> The Spirit is present at the fountain. O pious guest ! adore the waters whence drinking, Petrarch sang songs worthy of God.

a Florentine I envy Arquà, which, hitherto obscure, will become famous among the nations. The sailor returning from distant shores will gaze with emotion at the Euganean Hills, and will say to his companions: 'At the foot of those hills Petrarch is sleeping.' "

Did it possess this tomb only, Arquà would indeed be immortal. But it jealously guards another relic, the house where Laura's lover spent his last years. The road to this is very steep; it cannot have changed much since the day when the glorious coffin was borne down in the midst of the kneeling people between these same walls and over these same stones.

In front of the house is a little garden, modern unfortunately, for it does not appear in the engravings of last century; but there must have been one like it in the time of Petrarch. He loved his trees and flowers almost as much as his books, which is saying a good deal when we remember what a bibliophile he was. He was one of the first to appreciate natural scenery, and his surname, *Silvanus*, indicates his tastes. He compiled a very elaborate journal of gardening. One of his letters is headed: "From the shade of a chestnut-tree." In his old age his taste for the country increased, as is often the case; towards the end of life we draw nearer to the earth, as if to make a friend of that which will soon receive us. The splendour of noisy cities no longer charms eyes that are about to close; there is nothing so pleasant to the old as the warmth and radiance of sunshine. This is what Byron expresses in the fine verses of *Childe Harold* in which he evokes Petrarch: "If from society we learn to live, 'tis solitude should teach us how to die." In several of his last letters, the poet speaks of his garden, and notably of the tree that was so dear to him, the laurel with whose leaves he had been crowned in the Capitol, and whose name was

associated with that of his unforgotten love. Symbol of love and glory—that glory which was even more to him than love—to the end he sang the charm

Del dolce lauro e sua vista fiorita.<sup>1</sup>

Tradition says that all the laurels were killed by frost in the course of the hard winter after Petrarch's death; those in his garden cannot have escaped. And yet it is not impossible that the one which is still growing against the wall of the house may be a distant off-shoot of those he planted. This thought makes me hesitate a moment before taking the spray a hand holds out to me . . . . O poet, I have no claim to it save my pious admiration of thee! But I know thou wouldst not blame an impulse dictated by love.

A narrow staircase leads to a little *loggia* upheld by three columns. Everything is on a small scale in the garden and the house, as was necessary for the old man who was in constant need of a support within reach of his hand. The lover of solitude had not hesitated between the palace offered to him by the city of Venice in exchange for the gift of his books, and the quiet retreat among the Euganean Hills proposed by Francesco da Carrara. "Oh!" he wrote to a friend at Parma, "I am sure that were you to see my new Helicon you would never want to leave it." The house, which is very simple, has a vestibule into which the different rooms open; nearly all of them have balconies whence there are views either of the terraced hills sheltering each other from the winds, or, across the roofs of the village, of the wide plain of Battaglia.

The house in which a great writer has lived always appeals to our sensibilities, especially when it is in a village, or, better still, in the midst of fields. This is

<sup>1</sup> Of the sweet laurel and its flowery aspect.



because nature does not change, and that after many centuries we find the same mountains and the same rivers, very often the same forests and the same meadows. On the other hand, a very few years suffice to change the appearance of a town ; and even when the house of the poet is intact, all around it may be modified. We cannot recall the aspect and atmosphere of the Florence in which Dante lived. But in this little village of Arquà, nothing has stirred. Things have remained so essentially the same that, thinking of him, I cannot look at them without emotion. From this *loggia*, I see what Petrarch used to see. In its precision and intimacy, after a lapse of more than six centuries, it is one of the most moving of literary souvenirs. I can so readily imagine the poet contemplating the village and the vine-clad hillsides, and exchanging courteous greetings with the passing peasants, who could only dimly understand how this bent, white-haired old man, so like other old men, could be at once so simple and so glorious. How pathetic is this house in which he spent his last days, while Death was coming to meet him ! But it is a pity that its guardians have not preserved it intact, or even empty, instead of filling it with a number of incongruous accessories. The bare walls would have been so infinitely more thrilling than the indifferent frescoes of hooded Petrarchs and flower-crowned Lauras. I do not know whether the armchair and the cupboard belonged to the poet. The only well attested relic—O irony of fate !—is the mummy of his cat, which is exhibited in a niche, behind glass. The exhibition is as doubtful in taste as the verses of a certain Quarengo written below, which I transcribe as a curiosity. The cat is supposed to speak :  
 “ The Tuscan poet burned with a double flame ; I was his greatest, Laura his second love. Why do you laugh ? If Laura was worthy of him by her divine beauty, so

was I by my fidelity. If she excited his poetic genius, it was owing to my vigils that his writings did not become the prey of the terrible rodents. Living, I kept the rats away; dead, I still frighten them, and in my inanimate body my ancient fidelity survives." Would it not have been more appropriate to have inscribed the famous and beautiful sonnet written by Alfieri on the occasion of a visit to Arquà :

O cameretta, che già in te chiudesti  
 Quel grande, alla cui fama angusto è il mondo;  
 Quel sì gentil d'amor mastro profondo  
 Per cui Laura ebbe in terra onor celesti.<sup>1</sup>

The collection of old registers signed by visitors is interesting. I looked for the name of Byron, which appears twice, in 1817 and 1821. I forget in which of his works it is that he scoffs at Petrarch as an "old dotard," and "lachrymose metaphysician." One of his impulsive and passionate temperament had, of course, little sympathy for fidelity in love, and, no doubt, preferred husbands of the type of Guiccioli to Laura's spouse. However, this was probably a mere flippant sally, for which the noble verses in *Childe Harold* make ample amends. I did not find in these entries the name of Stendhal, who tells us that he spent four days at Arquà and who must certainly have visited the house of the poet, though he does not mention it. Yet he did not lack time to note his impressions, for he wrote here a long dissertation upon the difference in the conception of happiness as understood by Italians and by Frenchmen. Perhaps he agreed with Chateaubriand, who rallied those who seek to prolong their memory by

<sup>1</sup> O little room which formerly enclosed that great man, for whose fame the world is all too narrow; that gracious one, the profound master of love, through whom Laura enjoyed celestial honours while still on earth.

attaching a souvenir of their passage to famous places. One day, when the author of the *Mémoires d'outre Tombe* was trying to read a name he thought he recognised on the walls of Hadrian's villa, a bird flew out of a tuft of ivy and shook down a few drops of rain : the name had disappeared.

The only place in the house which has been scrupulously respected is the little library adjoining his bedroom, to which Petrarch loved to retreat. There he was alone and quiet. He escaped from the importunate, from visitors, from all who interrupted his work. "Reading writing, and meditating are still," he says, "as in my youth, my life and my delight. I am only surprised that after so much labour, I know so little." He feels that the hours are doubly precious and urge him on. "I hasten. I can sleep when I am under the earth." Going to rest very early, like the peasants of Arquà, he rose before them, in the middle of the night, lighted the little lamp hanging above his desk, and worked till dawn. It was thus his servants found him one July morning bending over a book. As they had often seen him in this attitude, they paid no particular attention. Petrarch had died in the night. M. Pierre de Nolhac believes that he discovered the very manuscript on which the poet's trembling hand ceased to write, in a reference to Cicero's works. He supposes that Petrarch made an effort to go and verify the reference and that he fainted as he sat down again. I prefer the older version, according to which his head had fallen inert on the pages of his beloved Virgil. True, Cicero and Virgil were almost equally the objects of his worship, and to the end of his life he offered them a joint homage :

Questi son gli occhi della lingua nostra.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These are the eyes of our tongue.



But he reserved his greatest tenderness for the poet. He had sought for memories of him at Mantua. Virgil's works were always with him, even when he was travelling. All bibliophiles know the manuscript on vellum, annotated by him, which is the glory of the Ambrosiana Library, and was for a time the pride of the Bibliothèque Nationale under Napoleon I. I like to think that this was the volume he took up to distract himself for a moment from his erudite labours. He read a few verses of the poet who was born on the other side of the Euganean Hills; he heard the larks sending up their joyous greeting to the new day; and he went out gently with the night, as a lamp without oil goes out in the freshness of morning. Thus the last breath of Laura's poet would have been breathed on the verses of the swan of Mantua. And if it be true that those in whom the pure flame of poetry has burned gather together in the sacred wood of the Muses, he who had already guided Dante in his immortal journey must have received Petrarch on the threshold of the temple of Apollo, and invited him to sit by his side, under the recovered shade of unfading laurel.

## CHAPTER XIV

## TREVISO

TREVISO is situated on the Sile, and in the centre of the town itself receives a little stream, the Botteniga, formerly called the Cagnan, as is recorded in a verse of the *Paradiso*, where Dante indicates Treviso as

. . . Dove Sile e Cagnan s'accompagna.<sup>1</sup>

The two rivers divide into numerous arms which feed a series of canals and ditches. Many gardens overhang the waters with verdure; certain vistas recall corners of Venice and even of Bruges.

I have been to Treviso so often that this year, untrammelled by the need to learn and to know, I can give myself up to the pleasures of a return to familiar scenes, and the mere delight of the eye. How often I have sauntered beneath the arcades of its tortuous streets, in its Piazza dei Signori surrounded by battlemented palaces, and above all, along the ancient ramparts, now transformed into wide promenades shaded by enormous trees, whence there is such a fine view of the snowy Alps in early spring. How pleasant it is to hear once more the lisping, supple, liquid Venetian dialect; it was of this Byron must have been thinking rather than of Italian in general, when, in his little poem *Beppo* he praises that tongue, "which melts like kisses from a female mouth, and sounds as if it should be writ on satin."

Treviso is justly proud of a few good pictures, notably

<sup>1</sup> Where Sile and Cagnan join company.

the *Annunciation* by Titian. It was ordered by Canon Malchiostro for his chapel in the Cathedral, and still hangs there in its original splendid columned frame. It is not, indeed, equal to the *Annunciation* of the Scuola di San Rocco, painted eight years later ; but it has a kind of joyous ardour which has always charmed me. The youthful Virgin, dressed in a red gown and a magnificent dark blue mantle, kneels in a reverential attitude ; she is one of the simplest and noblest figures Titian ever painted. The Angel has none of the sentimentality given him by certain painters ; he seems to have arrived in breathless flight, and the stormy sky behind him is full of great white clouds irradiated by rays of fire. There are some frescoes by Pordenone in this same Malchiostro Chapel which are not at all to my taste ; the artist was never more declamatory, I think, than when he tried to imitate the Michelangelo of the Sistine Chapel ; I recall a man whose enormous muscles have a deplorable effect in the foreground of the *Adoration of the Magi*, and in the dome, an interlacement of arms and legs which suggests a wrestling match rather than a religious scene. In the little Museum, the poverty of which is accentuated by the pompous title of *Pinacoteca*, there is nothing remarkable but a good portrait by Lotto, who, according to the latest experts, was not born at Treviso, but in Venice. It represents a Dominican monk, a Prior or Bursar ; his keys are in front of him and some pieces of money ; he is about to make up an account, and raising his head, he seems to be trying to remember some forgotten item. Lotto's manner is very evident in the serious, melancholy face.

I must confess that I have never succeeded in distinguishing the innumerable local painters, Dario da Treviso, Pier Maria Pennacchi, Girolamo da Treviso, Girolamo Pennacchi, Vincenzo da Treviso, etc. Only



a connoisseur would be able to differentiate amongst so many kindred names and almost identical works. But I looked again with pleasure at two little pictures by Girolamo da Treviso in the gallery leading to the Malchiostro Chapel, and I remember that one year, when I had come from Brescia, their silvery tones reminded me of Moretto.

Though one of the two most famous of Trevisan painters, Rocco Marconi, is not to be seen at all in his native town, the other, Paris Bordone, is represented by a masterpiece, the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, in the Cathedral. Although it has been damaged by restorations, and is badly lighted and imperfectly displayed in a rectangular frame which is ill adapted to the oval of the upper part of the picture, we are still able to appreciate the glowing colour and the skilful grouping of the figures. It is one of the finest achievements of this unequal painter, who imitated all the Venetian masters in turn, and had a great reputation in his day. "I do not think," wrote Aretino in a letter to him, "that Raphael ever gave his divine figures a more angelic expression, so much grace, spirit and novelty (*vaghezza, aria e novitade*)."  
Aretino, it is true, was never remarkable for moderation either in praise or blame, and it is not only the critics of to-day who sometimes overwhelm artists with exaggerated eulogy; but this may explain why Titian disliked this pupil, who was putting himself forward as a rival. Time has allotted his due place to each. Paris Bordone would hardly be remembered were he not the author of *A Fisherman restoring the ring of St. Mark to the Doge*, the charming anecdotic page of local history which Burckhardt considers the best ceremonial picture ever painted. Paris Bordone was an excellent artist of the second rank among that pleiad of painters which shone almost simultaneously in the sky of the Republic.

## CHAPTER XV

## CASTELFRANCO

OF all the cities of the rich Venetian plain I know none more picturesque than the two neighbours and sometime rivals, Cittadella and Castelfranco. Still enclosed in their mediæval walls, they are like stone baskets draped with ivy and filled with flowers : in spring wisteria, in June the perfumed tassels of the acacia, and again in autumn the late flowering wisterias.

The Italians have preserved the exquisite Renaissance sense of beauty, and, save for a few faults of taste, nearly all very recent, they have instinctively applied it to their cities. Their adaptation of the *castelli*, citadels, wells and moats of their decadent towns has always been most happy from the decorative point of view. I have already often noted the skilful use they have made of those ancient structures which could not hold out against modern artillery for an hour. Instead of demolishing and levelling as we have too often done in France, they respected the useless ramparts and transformed them into splendid shady promenades, whence the eye may range unwearied over prospects and horizons. Here they have done better still. They left the fortified *enceinte* of the 12th and 13th centuries untouched, and, at the foot of the walls and on the verges of the moat, they planned gardens, planted trees, and sowed grass and flowers, so that the two little towns have now a triple girdle of stone, of verdure and of water. They are like those mummies swathed in bandages which still retain their living form after thousands of years.

A visit to Castelfranco is to me typical of one of those

full and joyous Italian days when, in exquisite surroundings and undisturbed by intruders, one may contemplate a masterpiece at one's ease. There is nothing to disturb my wanderings under the plane-trees that are mirrored in the Musone, where the tall water-plants writhe like serpents. It is true that the Castle and the 12th century walls are partly in ruins; but a thick drapery of ivy, moss and Virginian creeper covers them as with a richly coloured mantle. The bricks show different tints in the changeful light, from pale pink to the dark red of clotted blood. The flowers that star the verdure add to the romantic air of these ruins. I know a corner where the grass plots are planted with *Olea fragrans*, whose incense fills the air when the clouds are fringed with purple and gold at sunset.

The gate under the square tower before which a draw-bridge was once in use still gives access to the old town. One passes under a low dark porch dominated by the lion of S. Mark and a few steps brings one to the little square at the end of which is the Cathedral containing one of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful of all Giorgiones, and, in any case, the most fully authenticated. My first sight of it many years ago late in the afternoon when the descending sun shed a soft radiance on the canvas, gave me one of the strongest æsthetic emotions of my life. And each time I return, the feeling is almost as violent. Is this due to the composition, so curious in its geometrical precision? Or to the three figures that hold themselves erect in rigid serenity? Or to the exquisite landscape? Or to the harmonious splendour of the colour? I know not. But a poetry at once tender and severe breathes from the picture and moves me deeply. The Virgin, draped in a blue robe and an ample red mantle, is seated on a massive throne at the top of the canvas, as if to carry our eyes upwards to her, and



from her to God. S. Francis and S. Liberale stand at her feet. The former may have been inspired by a figure of Bellini's, but the San Liberale is entirely original in conception and execution ; I know nothing but Mantegna's S. George at all comparable to it. The warrior wears a suit of burnished steel armour and a helmet ; with an air of martial gallantry he holds a tall standard with a white cross on a red ground, like the lance of a French dragoon. Stationed on either side of the throne, the two Saints form with the Virgin an almost perfect triangle ; the three figures confront the spectator and bear no relation to each other. I have too often found fault with this cold symmetry in the works of artists such as Perugino to be able to approve it here ; but, as a fact, the general effect is so majestic that it is easy to overlook the somewhat childish awkwardness of such an arrangement. The Virgin above all is unforgettable. To me there is no other so beautiful. There is a tradition that, on the occasion of an ancient restoration, an appeal to the model written by Giorgione's own hand was found on the back of the canvas :

Cara Cecilia  
Vieni ; t'affretta ;  
Il tuo t'aspetta  
Giorgio.<sup>1</sup>

We must forgive Cecilia her unpunctuality, if it was she who enabled the painter to trace the immortal features of his Virgin. But Giorgione must have idealised her, unlike most of his contemporaries who were content merely to reproduce the beautiful women of street or countryside for their Madonnas and Saints. He gave her an expression of lofty nobility, and under his brush the humble maiden of Castelfranco became one of the most perfect creations of Italian art.

<sup>1</sup> Dear Cecilia come, hasten. Giorgio is waiting for thee.

After several days spent in studying the painters of this Venetian School, one is able to appreciate the importance of the revolution effected by Giorgione. True, the Bellini had already broken with mediæval methods to some extent ; nevertheless, they remained masters of the 15th century by their artistic education, their choice of subject, and their somewhat dry precision. They felt vaguely that there were other horizons ; but for the discovery of these what was needed was a more spontaneous genius, an initiator, a kind of Fire-bearer, as d'Annunzio calls Giorgione in pages where he shows him less as a man than as a myth. " No poet's destiny on earth was comparable to his. We know nothing of him ; some have even gone so far as to deny his existence. His name is written on no authentic work. And yet all Venetian art was fired by his revelation ; it was from him that Titian learned to infuse warm blood into the veins of his creatures. Indeed, what Giorgione represents in art is an Epiphany of Fire. He deserves the title of Fire-bearer no less than Prometheus." This analogy of fire seems to suggest itself naturally to the pens of those who write of him. "*Lo spirito di Bellini,*" declares Venturi, "*ma scaldato da un' anima di fuoco.*"<sup>1</sup> And when Italians speak of the Giorgionesque fire, they mean not only that warmth of colour characteristic of him, but also that spiritual flame, that poetry which burns and devours. This explains the fascination of Giorgione for the poets of all times and all countries, a fascination due not only to the mystery of his life and death, but to his work itself. It was a copy of the *Concert Champêtre* which Musset bought on credit, in the face of his housekeeper's objections, telling her that she could lay his place at table opposite the picture, and cut down the meal by one dish daily.

<sup>1</sup> " The spirit of Bellini, but warmed by a soul of fire."

Another of Giorgione's merits is that he definitely directed Venetian painting towards landscape. Of course, he was still far from the modern conception, by which the artist paints Nature for itself, seeking only to render the impression he receives from it; but he was equally remote from the antique conception. For centuries no one had dreamt of rebelling against the rule formulated by Plato in his *Critias*: "If an artist has to paint the earth, mountains, rivers, a forest, or the sky . . . he need only represent them in a fairly credible manner . . . a vague, illusory sketch will satisfy us." Was not this, indeed, the theory of Botticelli, who maintained that one had only to throw a sponge soaked in colours against a wall in order to obtain an effect comparable to that of the finest landscapes? I know of certain ultra-modern schools which seem to be inspired by the same principles. But, fundamentally, we must see in Plato's pronouncement as in Botticelli's gibe the thesis that the artist must confine himself to the study of man, and the portrayal of the complexities of the soul. Even in the works of Botticelli—as in those of most Tuscan and Umbrian painters—there are charming landscapes which were obtained not with "a sponge soaked in colours," but with a very skilful and precise brush; but they are mainly imaginary, and are quite indifferent to truth; they serve merely to fill in the background of the picture. The Venetians, on the other hand, sought to paint real landscapes; as Stendhal has very justly pointed out: "The Venetian School seems to have been born merely from the attentive contemplation of the effects of Nature, and the almost mechanical and instinctive imitation of the pictures with which it delights our eyes." More than any of his colleagues, Giorgione had the soul of the landscape-painter, and was deeply interested in the problems of light and of chiaroscuro.



We know from a letter of Isabella d'Este's that he had painted a night-scene which the princess wished to possess. True, he never copied a tree, a hill, or a stream in the same manner as the Dutchmen, or some of our modern painters; he sought inspiration from his native land for the scenes in which he placed the action of his pictures, and idealised it, as he idealised Cecilia. Thus he transports us to a land which is at once Venetia and the Elysian Fields, a sort of fatherland of the ideal, as Yriarte says: "a lovely dream-world which belongs only to poets, painters, musicians, inspired artists, to those whose brows Heaven has marked with a divine ray, and which it has given to man to lull his pain and charm his hasty passage on earth."

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It is this fusion of the real and the ideal that delights me in the Giorgione of the Patriarchal Seminary at Venice, where I have come to spend my last afternoon. The *Daphne pursued by Apollo* is a little picture on wood which was formerly the panel of a marriage-chest. Figures and landscapes combine in a suave harmony. a warm red tonality throws Daphne's creamy carnations and white tunic into strong relief. It is the gem of this tiny museum, a haunt of peace, although it adjoins the port of San Marco. I love its delicious little garden, crowded with trees and flowers. Pines raise their delicate foliage against the blue sky. Tall cypresses, magnolias with polished leaves, clumps of oleanders, ivy and wisteria climbing everywhere, on the balustrades, on the stair-rails, on the trunks of the trees, form a regular entanglement of verdure. Above the walls one sees the turrets of the Salute, and on the side towards the port, the gently swaying masts of vessels. Like the invisible music of the old palaces on the Grand Canal, where the performers played concealed behind

the hangings, the occasional noises of the town arrive here so precise and yet so muffled that they seem at once very distant and very near. Here there are none of those hurrying tourists who spoil the most beautiful things. And how well this scene harmonises with my melancholy! To-morrow I shall be far away. "I must go, alas!" wrote Gebhart on leaving Athens. "I am about to turn over another page of my youth, and to turn my back on the East. If it should be for the last time . . . !" But what is the use of analysing anew the laments born of the sadness of farewells? At the close of these Italian hours I should be ungrateful were I to forget that not one of them leaves me a memory of anything but happiness. They might all be marked by the old Venetian sundial on which I read long ago, during my first visit: *Horas non numero nisi serenas* (I only count the sunny hours).

PART V

TYROL, FRIULI, AND NEW ITALY





## CHAPTER I

### THE DOLOMITES

I HAD such pleasant memories of Bolzano as I had seen it each time I had entered Italy from the Brenner Pass, that this year I determined to spend a few days there and enter Venetia by way of the Dolomites, and the Italian Tyrol. Bolzano has all the Latin grace. It smiles amidst sunshine and flowers. On the slopes of its hills, figs and pomegranates ripen at the foot of black cypresses and evergreen laurels. The rich and fertile country, the luxuriant vines, the houses, the farms, some of which have gaily painted façades, the open air markets, the booths, the faces, the flexible patois, which recalls the lisping Venetian dialect, and, above all, the blue vault of a sky at once profound and ethereal, all proclaim the joy of life. The descent into Italy on the Italian slopes is always intoxicating, and I love the hospitable air of the little towns that present themselves after, and occasionally before, one crosses the frontier, spots where Alpine dignity has met and mingled with Southern sweetness. There can be nothing more exquisite than this first easy contact which announces the approach of the fair enchantresses of the South, and never is this sense of warm well-being more pleasurable than after a sojourn in Switzerland, or Bavaria. To leave Lausanne, Lucerne, or Munich on a dull, damp morning, to pass through landscapes grandiose but lacking colour, then gradually to see the sky becoming bluer and brighter,

the sun piercing the clouds and spreading in golden pools over the festal country, to feel one's numbed limbs relax and one's eyes open more widely to the light—these are the most perfect physical joys I know, and I understand the exaltation of all those who experience them. Sweet Italy, I, for one, will never ridicule thy lovers, even when passion carries them away, for how often I have longed to clasp thee as Paolo clasped Francesca :

la bocca mi baciò, tutto tremante . . .<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, their extravagance delights me. I was charmed the other day when reading the elder Dumas' *Voyage en Suisse* to find him becoming almost incoherent as soon as he felt the first breath of Lombard air in the Simplon Pass, and saw the flat-roofed white houses warming themselves in the sun like swans. His romanticism brims over as he salutes Italy, the ancient Queen, the eternal coquette, the Armida of all the ages, who sends her women and her flowers to greet you. "Instead of the goitrous peasants of the Valais one meets at every step beautiful vintagers with pale skins, velvety eyes and soft, swift speech. The sky is pure, the air warm, and one recognises, as Plutarch says, the land beloved of the gods, the holy land, the happy land which neither barbarian invasion nor civil disorder has been able to rob of the gifts bestowed on it by Heaven." In connection with Bolzano I have already spoken of Goethe's enthusiasm, which to some has seemed rather childish. In the quiet atmosphere of a study the calm of Montaigne, who, on his way from Augsburg to Venice, declared that Bolzano, "a town about the size of Libourne, is an unpleasant place," and praised only the wine and the bread, may seem more natural. But on this day of

<sup>1</sup> And kissed me on the mouth, all tremulous. . . .



late summer, when I had left Munich in rain and cold, I was inclined, like the poet, to salute the very dust of the sunlit landscape. With what joy I greeted the valley of the Adige with its barriers of red porphyry, and smiling Bolzano, whose horizon is closed by the bright walls of the Rosengarten, its mountain with the flowery name!

At Bolzano the new road of the Dolomites, opened to motor traffic some ten years ago, begins. There is no mountain road to be compared with it. There are others more remarkable, it is true, for their altitude and their views of snow-capped peaks and glaciers, although this climbs three peaks over 6,000 feet high; but none can surpass it in magnificence and picturesqueness. The majestic landscapes it traverses change and vary incessantly. There is none of that obsession which, in the presence of Mont Blanc, the Meije, or the Jungfrau produces that sense of suffocation which many are unable to bear. At each turn, at each loop, peaks arise with their fantastic rocks, clear-cut against the deep blue sky. They suggest the strange battlements of I know not what bombarded and dismantled citadel, and ruined towers shattered by shells. Their yellow and red calcareous walls, combining with the white of the snow, the blue of the sky, the green of the meadows and pine-trees, produce the most amazing colour-contrasts. No Alpine region can give any idea of these curious heights; the only thing I know at all comparable to Dolomite crests, on a smaller scale and in a grayer aspect, is the almost unknown amphitheatre of Archiane, in the Diois Mountains. Their special charm is the addition of sunshine and colour to the grandeur of lofty mountain scenery. It would take long months to become familiar with the varied and prodigious effects of light produced among these peaks by dawn, noon, twilight and moonlight; and to witness one of those storms

which are said to be unimaginable in their splendour. Lightnings flash almost continuously on the rocks, the iron ore in which attracts the electricity ; the innumerable peaks form so many turrets provided with lightning conductors. Sometimes great round clouds are driven by the south winds against these walls saturated with fluid, and explode into incessant sparks ; seen from below they look like huge Japanese lanterns, enormous globes constantly illuminated by internal lights. The sunsets, more especially, have a splendour unknown elsewhere and not to be rendered by pen or brush ; the water-colours of Jeanès, who lived several years in the district, are the only pictures which succeed in suggesting this incandescence of the peaks, this *Alpenglut* in all its magnificence. It sometimes happens that by an unexplained phenomenon, certain summits become suddenly luminous an hour or two after sunset, and take on a crimson glow like molten steel ; the effect of these mountains flaming out suddenly in the darkness is extraordinary.

This road through the Dolomites, which is closed in the winter months and the strategic importance of which the Austrians tried to mask by a show of Alpine climbing, is a marvel of audacity both in conception and execution. Nowhere, indeed, are travelling facilities better understood and better organised than in Tyrol ; the character of the country has nearly always been respected ; there are few hotels on mountain peaks, funicular railways, waterfalls skilfully kept up, or grottoes artificially lighted. In one day, powerful motor-cars do the ninety miles that divide Bolzano from Cortina. They take the mountains by assault, climbing the interminable loops without a pause, rushing past forests, meadows, bridges and scattered villages, punctuating the vast silence with their panting breath, and halting on the summits, exhausted but proud of having overcome all

obstacles. It really seems as if they felt like us the intoxication of speed ; a sort of communicative emotion makes us regulate the very pulsations of our hearts by their movement.

The larger cars which cannot yet pass by the Karersee descend the valley of the Adige as far as the Auer, skirt the Latemar and rejoin the direct road from Bolzano to Cortina at Vigo di Fassa. After Canazei, which is dominated by sharp peaks like giants' fingers stretched threateningly heavenward, a series of loops, in the midst of pine-woods and pasture-lands, climb the Val Fassa between the enormous rocks of the Sella and the cloven sides of the Marmolata, placed like a sovereign in the centre of the chain it dominates. A tiny lake, intensely blue, is so well situated in a frame-work of pines and rocks that it looks as if it had been expressly designed to complete the picture. After the peak of Pordoi is crossed, the road runs down rapidly towards Arabba, in the green valley of the nascent Cordevole. It is an idyllic corner where the meadows in spring are sprinkled with lilies, coloured primroses, orchis and rampion—a vast, gaily-coloured carpet. Now, at the end of August, the grass is already brown and the autumn crocuses, the last flowers of the year, open their pale pink calices. The horizon is bounded by the Tofana, towards which the car rushes forward with a renewal of effort. This ascent of Falzarego at full speed is one of the grandest and most poignant experiences imaginable. Nature becomes savage ; the loops in the road run over masses of fallen rock with astonishing audacity, and sometimes through tunnels. You cross the summit between the jagged rocks of the Croce da Lago and the Cinque Torri which seem indeed to be the ruins of an ancient feudal *enceinte*. Then comes the giddy rushing descent. A cry of admiration escapes



one's lips : suddenly, at a bend of the road, the whole valley of Ampezzo is revealed, that marvellous amphitheatre where, in the golden light of declining day, Cortina is enshrined, Cortina the unrivalled, the gem of the Tyrol, set in the emerald of its fields and encircled by the rubies and topazes of its rocks.

Is it not one of the greatest joys of travel to come upon places which are at once so dear to us that we long to remain and spend the rest of our lives in them ? These are not always the most beautiful, and I know some magnificent spots which dazzle the eyes without touching the heart. Others, more reticent in their charm, attract us as if mysterious bonds were linking us to them. But there are some especially favoured, at once splendid and appealing, which win us so quickly that at a first glance we feel tears in our eyes, and stretch out our arms instinctively as if to draw them to our breast.

In spite of all I had heard of Cortina, I did not expect to find it so lovely. No sight could be more superb than the sunset view from the Crepa, a sort of rocky headland thrusting out above the circus of Ampezzo. From this moderate eminence the valley is seen in its entirety, without that reduction of the landscape to a kind of relief map which occurs from many famous points of view. Cortina lies at the bottom of a green goblet filled with the perfume of its myriad-blossomed meadows. The sturdy mass of La Tofana, the long chain of the Pomagagnon dominated by Monte Cristallo, the Sorapiss, the Rochetta and the Cinque Torri encircle it on every side. Above the forests that cover their feet, the bare, jagged walls rise into the limpid atmosphere, taking on a greater intensity of light and colour as the shadow creeps over the valley. The light clouds driven towards them by the south wind (the sea-breeze, as it is called in the district) are caught between the sharp points, like

strands of hair between the teeth of a yellow tortoise-shell comb. Gradually the reds and golds become stronger. The rocks seem to be on fire. The impression is strange, unique. I understand why d'Annunzio when he wanted to suggest the illumination which occasionally lights up a face, "till it surpasses reality and stands out against the sky of destiny itself," could find no more vivid simile than the glow on these Dolomites, "when their crests alone are ablaze in the twilight, graven upon the gloom."

But for the sudden freshness of the evening air as soon as the sun has disappeared, it would be difficult to realise that one is in the mountains, and one might suppose the atmosphere to be that of a plateau of the Apennines. The blue is as deep as above the Tuscan valleys; when a cloud passes across it, it is so suffused with light that it looks more buoyant and transparent than a soap-bubble. The whole of this region is, moreover, Italian geographically and ethnographically. The valleys of the Boite and its affluents are in fact merely a canton of Cadore. Whereas on the other side of the peaks that bound the valley of Ampezzo the names have all the German harshness (Schluderbach, Toblach, Dürrenstein, etc.), here the names of towns, rivers, and mountains sing in the softest language of the world, the only one where every word ends in a vowel. The race, the costume, the affable manners no less than the speech reveal an evident community of origin. But after belonging to Venice, which gave it the title of *Magnifica Comunità*, it became Austrian in 1518, by virtue of the treaty between the Most Serene Republic and the Emperor Maximilian. In 1866, when Venetia was restored to Italy, the Val d'Ampezzo was detached from Cadore and remained under Hapsburg domination.

One spot, however, in the region has always been left

to the Southern rival : this is Misurina, whose musical name is as harmonious as the shores of its little lake. The road which leads to it from Cortina is one of the most enchanting imaginable ; a writer has called it the *passeggio romantico del Cadore* (the romantic promenade of Cadore). It ascends along the Bigontina, now under the feathery foliage of larches, now through flower-enamelled meadows. Here and there, the air is sweet with the scent of new-mown hay. From the top of the Tre Croci, at the very foot of the pale rocks of the Cristallo, we overlook the whole amphitheatre of Ampezzo, like a vast green scallop-shell covered with forests, meadows, cultivated fields and scattered houses. Then we go down into a fresh valley, where the grass is studded with tall blue gentians, and almost immediately we see the wide opening at the end of which the lake is sparkling in the sun. The scene is at once grandiose and gay. Above the water, greenly transparent as a fine emerald, woods and meadows, terraced on the hill-sides, form a first dark girdle, behind which rise some of the finest of the Dolomites : Cadini, the spurs of Cristallo, the imposing rocks of the Tre Cimi di Lavaredo, sharply cut as geometrical figures, Cyclopean pyramids, built by giants, and lofty Sorapiss stretching out its mighty snow-draped flanks.

The lake is slumbering peacefully in the radiance of dying day. We are alone upon these banks which the approach of autumn has already left to solitude. There is not a ripple on the water ; when we lean over it, it sends back our moving figures set against the eternal background of peaks and forests reflected in its depths. But why has civilisation intruded, to tarnish this mirror by building two huge hotels, so riotous in the season, so melancholy when their factitious life has been extinguished by the first touch of winter in the air ?



## CHAPTER II

### FROM CORTINA TO PIEVE DI CADORE

BECAUSE we have seen the birth of the automobile, and almost that of railways, we imagine that we are the inventors of travel. Nothing could be falser. The desire to see unknown countries existed in antiquity. Seneca, struck by this innate love of change in man, explains it by the divine essence within us, for, says he, "the nature of heavenly things is to be always in motion." Impelled by duty or necessity, by neurasthenia or snobbery—only the words are modern—by the love of pleasure, or the thirst for information, the ancients moved about a great deal, and Socrates, who never left Athens, because "he loved learning, and the trees and fields could teach him nothing," must have been an exception. In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance the longing for new horizons developed steadily. And never was the delight of going from town to town more keenly felt. To-day, even when we leave the railway for a motor-car, we do not come into real contact with the country. It is in a leisurely carriage, travelling a few leagues in a day, or, better still, with staff in hand, that one learns to know a land. It was the tourists of bygone centuries who tasted the pure joys of travel. Happy were the days described by Ruskin when one could pass slowly along the highways between woods and meadows, stopping to gather a flower at will ; when one could note the gradual changes of soil, trees, light, sky and faces ; when one submitted quietly to those natural conditions which, by distributing life in valleys and on mountains, give character to landscape and fashion its very soul.

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Just as the easiest pleasures are not the highest, so the most comfortable journeys are not the most delightful. It is impossible to appreciate the charm of a region without transitions. A preparation, an initiation and a certain contemplative calm are necessary. In former times distance, difficulties and expectation invested the longed-for goal with mystery. Every day the traveller became worthier of the emotions he was going so far to experience. And I cannot believe that Italy can ever be so enchanting to us as to those artists of the past, who set off for it without means, but full of inspiration, stopping at Dijon, Lyons, or Avignon to earn the money necessary for the continuation of the journey, and gradually approaching the promised land with a fervour all the greater for their delays and sufferings.

Let us for once do as they did, and take the eighteen miles between Cortina and Pieve on foot. We shall hardly find a more favourable opportunity. The day has risen fresh and luminous; the road, which follows the course of the Boite, is shady and full of variety. What a primitive joy it is to walk thus in the early morning, now along meadows so smoothly green that they lie like a velvet cloak on the soil, now in the middle of forests where larch and pine alternate. The inhabitants live out of doors, on the roads; we feel they are rejoicing in the warm sunshine before the rigours of winter come upon them. The fruit-trees begin. Fields of clover and lucerne gleam rosily in the light. Houses and villages are more frequent. And yet we are still among lofty mountains, over 3,000 feet above the plain. The contrast between this valley and the stern mountains that surround it is exquisite. Who could be insensible to its seduction? I remember how a few months before his death, Courajod loved to express his admira-

tion for these regions. "Love and delight in this incomparable landscape, which that pedant Winckelmann could not appreciate. One of my greatest grievances against him and his sectarian band is his depreciation of Tyrol and the frontiers of Italy."

The road, especially at San Vito and Venas, where it is constricted by the spurs of the Pelmo and the Antelao, runs through narrow defiles rich in heroic memories. All this Cadore region was admirable in its proud independence. Its unity of language, custom and sentiment made it at all times a little Alpine republic. It was at first attached to the Patriarchate of Aquileia. When the latter submitted to Venice, the Republic summoned Cadore to do likewise. Interest and sympathy alike impelled the Cadorians to acquiesce, but first they insisted on being absolved from their oath of fealty by the Patriarch himself; after which they made certain conditions which were all accepted by Venice. It was then they gave themselves up to Venice with cries of *Eamus ad bonos Venetos* (Let us go to the good Venetians). For four centuries they lived governed by their own laws, under the protection of the lion of S. Mark; and this had no more valiant defenders than they, as was seen in the famous Battle of Cadore, when the burghers of Pieve, aided by the peasants, surprised and routed Maximilian's Reiters. This was the battle Titian painted for the Doge's Palace; unfortunately the work was destroyed in a fire; we know it only by the fragmentary sketch in the Uffizi, and by Giulio Fontana's engraving. Later, in the middle of last century, during the wars of independence, the little towns of Cadore, true sentinels of the fatherland, struggled with the same ardour. The representatives of all the communes assembled in the old town-hall of Pieve and, like their forefathers, proclaimed their



devotion to Venice: *Votiamoci a San Marco* (we vow ourselves to S. Mark). It was this heroism and this glorious past that Carducci sang in the splendid hymn he composed to the glory of Cadore, on the shores of Misurina, a veritable war-song in which there is, as it were, a roar of savage hatred against the barbarians of the North :

Nati su l'ossa nostra, ferite, figliuoli, ferite  
sopra l'eterno barbaro :  
da nevai che di sangue tingemmo crociate, macigni,  
valanghe, stritolatelo !<sup>1</sup>

But to-day, on this radiant morning, sunshine and perfume incline us rather to reverie than to battle. After lunching in an inn at Borca, we set off again under a sun which makes our next stage rather more strenuous. As we descend, the road, bordered with houses, becomes like a long village street. Peasant women pass on their way to the fountain, their copper pails shining at the ends of a long bow which they carry gracefully on their shoulders. At the turn of Tai, we see the houses of Pieve perched on the height ; we leave the road which continues on the right, to Belluno ; and after a short climb we enter the town of Titian.

<sup>1</sup> Born upon our bones, strike, sons, strike the eternal barbarian ; from the snows which we dyed with our blood rain down rocks, avalanches, grind him to pieces !

## CHAPTER III

### PIEVE DI CADORE

It is strange that a spot so picturesque and interesting should be so neglected by tourists as is Pieve di Cadore. It is barely mentioned by Baedeker, and the majority of travellers avoid it, and at Tai set their faces towards Venice, fascinated by its vicinity. True, the inn is not first-rate and there are no artistic treasures; but few of the smaller Italian towns are more charmingly situated. Pieve is built on a kind of slope with green mamelons gay with gardens, in the midst of lawns and woods. There is not a street, not a road which does not mount and descend, twist and turn. The one little square is aslope and awry; it was only just possible to find a tiny plateau for the statue of Titian on the level of the town-hall, which is itself all awry in relation to the buildings that surround the square. These have retained their original simple façades. Pieve is unspoilt by modernism. In certain corners of Italy there are still to be found spots which have been undisturbed since the 15th century, and whose inhabitants, as M. Paul Bourget says, have an instinct for duration and preservation which the execrable mania for being up-to-date will not easily destroy.

Slightly below the square, on the Piazzetta dell' Arsenale is the house where the greatest and most famous of Venetian painters was born. No surroundings could have been better adapted to train and charm the eye of him who was to be the first of landscape-painters, and the unrivalled master of colour. Built on heights which rise pyramidally from the hollow of a valley surrounded on all sides by hills and peaks, Pieve

commands an incomparable variety of panoramas, where planes succeed each other in every direction, and at every distance. The play of light and shade changes every moment; the eye learns freely and easily to seize all its variations. How Titian must have longed for these mountains, these forests, these restful meadows so grateful to the tired eye, each hot July, when the canals of Venice were breathing out their miasmas and sulphureous odours! Like the prisoner spoken of by Milton, who escaped one summer morning and noticed in the country a thousand lovely things he had never remarked before, he felt a childlike joy when, leaving his house, he struck into the path of the hill which overlooks the amphitheatre of Pieve and is crowned by the ancient citadel, the guardian of Cadore. From the roads that run round it, there is a series of glimpses of the valleys below the town which, as far as the eye can reach, are seen stretching away between lofty green walls; the most important is that of the Piave, the silvery track of which may be followed a very long way. Numerous villages are dotted like coral beads along the white ribbon of the roads which lead to Cortina, Belluno, or Auronzo. All the slopes are hung with woods and meadows. The country is not divided into fields of various crops; it is like a great park which a rich owner has laid out, or, rather, which he has kept intact as Nature made it. Behind the first slopes the mountains rise, climbing one above the other. And towards the North, dominating all, stand the dolomite peaks of the Marmarole Chain:

Le Marmorole care al Vecellio.<sup>1</sup>

as Carducci calls them, a gigantic barrier of 9,000 feet which protects Pieve from cold winds.

From the windows of his house Titian could see these

<sup>1</sup> The Marmarole dear to Vecellio.



Marmarole mountains. Above the roof of the villages and the first wooded heights, their sharp ridges stand out against the luminous sky. He saw them clothed with pale opalescent tints at dawn, and in the evening flaming through the gathering dusk. But it was not only these jagged peaks that haunted his imagination. All the Cadore landscape lives again in his works. If we were to study them carefully from this point of view we could see that he has reproduced nearly every aspect of the scene: the pointed rocks where a few meagre pines have found foothold, the smiling, flower-starred meadows, the dark woods, the villages on the heights or along the Piave, and, above all, the hardy, muscular types of beauty proper to mountaineers and woodmen. The peasants I encounter in the streets have not changed since he painted them; they move, as it were, in the eternal, following a secular rhythm. They have the powerful heads and thick beards of his Apostles. At the inn, a notable of the town, who is having a discussion with one of his farmers, has the noble features, the wide forehead, the harsh hair and the keen eyes which Titian gave to himself in his own portraits at Florence and in Berlin. Ah! how true a son he is of that race, which, on the road from Venice to Augsburg, unites the vigour of the North with the subtlety of the South; how true a son of that country where the keen air and habits of toil and sobriety ensure robust health. He is a typical son of Cadore, and his compatriots have a right to honour him. On the humble house which was the birthplace of him "who by his art prepared his country for independence," they have placed a memorial tablet, and in the little square they have given him a sober monument in excellent taste—one of the best modern statues I have seen—with this simple inscription: "To Titian, from Cadore."

The district is not rich in the master's works ; the *Holy Family* in the church of Pieve is the only picture that can be plausibly ascribed to him. Local tradition identifies several of the figures with members of his family ; the Madonna is said to be Lavinia, whose face and form are known to us from other works ; the S. Joseph is supposed to be his father ; the Bishop his son Pomponio and the clerk Titian himself ; on this last point there can be no doubt ; it is obviously a portrait of the master closely akin to that in the Madrid Gallery. Crowe and Cavalcaselle think his son Orazio was probably the painter of this *Holy Family*. It is quite possible, for it is a mediocre work as a whole. But it seems a pity to destroy the tradition. And after all, what does it matter ? I did not come to Pieve to study Titian's pictures, but to see his native place, the landscape where his eyes were opened to the beauty of the world, and where his artist soul awoke. It was here he lived in the woods and fields which are, for those who understand them, the best school of truth and simplicity. Nature has always taught love of sincerity, hatred of the artificial, the recondite, the affected, and here I evoke, not the illustrious portrait-painter of crowned heads, but him who was one of the first to love and paint Nature with all the faith and ardour of the peasant.

No artist before him studied mountains and their various aspects. I do not say that he was a painter of mountains, or that he painted these for their own sakes ; but no artist of his day contemplated them more lovingly, or derived more picturesque motives from them. True, in certain Quattrocento pictures, the horizon is bounded by heights, and in the works of the Florentine masters we often recognise the outline of the Tuscan hills. The Venetians, who put landscapes in nearly all their works, were inspired by the scenery most fami-

liar to them, and reproduced the mountain-slopes that fringe the Trevisan plain, or the silhouette of the Friulian Mountains. In several of the canvases of Leonardo da Vinci, who never forgot the Dolomite Peaks, we recognise their craggy outlines as a background. But by all these masters, mountains are used merely as a decorative line.

In this connection it is interesting to note how tardy was the awakening of artists and writers to the beauty of mountains. For a very long time, the only emotions inspired by Alpine and Apennine heights were distaste and terror. To the Latins the most perfect of panoramas was the cultivated plain. Lucretius knew no pleasure comparable to that of "lying beside a running stream, under the shade of a lofty tree," and Virgil loved nothing so much as "cultivated fields and the rivers that flow through valleys." The Alps were only crossed as a matter of necessity after a vow to Jupiter *pro ita et reditu* (for going and returning) and Claudian compares the sight of glaciers to that of the Gorgon, so great was his alarm thereat. The lofty summits were looked upon as the dread abodes of storm and inundation; legend made them the homes of the maleficent gods. I can recall but two exceptions; the Emperor Hadrian, one of the most fervent of Nature-worshippers—as he showed by his construction of his villa at Tivoli—who climbed Mount Casius to see a sunrise, and Lucilius the Younger, that first-century poet who wrote a poem upon Etna. He was probably the only Latin writer who was surprised at the indifference of his contemporaries to natural spectacles; he could not understand why they should exert themselves to go and see pictures and statues, and yet should not deign to take a journey in order to contemplate the works of Nature, "who is a much greater artist than man." This almost superstitious



feeling about mountains persisted through the Middle Ages. It is very curious to read Petrarch's account to Cardinal Giovanni Colonna of his ascent of Mont Ventoux. He hesitated for a long time before undertaking it, and only made up his mind after seeing in Livy that King Philip went up Hemus. An old shepherd adjured him to turn back, predicting all sorts of misfortunes . . . He continued his ascent, but on reaching the top, his fear and agitation were so great that he was obliged to sit down. He opened the *Confessions* of S. Augustine, and lighted upon this passage, which alarmed him, and seemed to him to have been chosen by God Himself: "Men go to admire lofty mountains, and the sea raging afar off, and foaming torrents, and they forget themselves in this contemplation." Until the 18th century and Jean Jacques Rousseau, no one was concerned with the beauty of Alpine scenery, and the whole group of Mont Blanc was designated vaguely as *glaciers*. Not before Calame and Ruskin do we find an artist and a writer who truly and passionately felt and loved the mountains. It is evident that they are ill-adapted to painting; they lack uncertainty, infinity; they have too many precise details which arrest the eye; they limit vision and reverie. Their colours, too, are crude and uniform. But here we must make exception of the Dolomites, so various in outline, so luminous, so richly and diversely coloured at every hour of the day, so transparent at times; along their smooth vertical walls the eye and the mind mount easily to the azure.

Among the Venetian painters who were nearly all natives of the mainland and often of the districts among the first spurs of the Alps, Titian was the most Northern. He was born on the confines of Tyrol in a lofty and very uneven country. An English writer, Mr. Gilbert, declares that while exploring Cadore, he identified all

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the mountains in Titian's works. I think this is an exaggerated claim ; but there is no doubt that in his drawings and pictures we shall find, if not exact reproductions, at least many reminiscences and more or less faithful adaptations of the scenery he loved. Not long ago, looking at the portrait of *Doña Isabella of Portugal* in the Prado at Madrid, I recognised the panorama of Pieve, with its green hill in the foreground and its background of jagged peaks. In the *Presentation of the Virgin* of the Accademia at Venice, the mountain that rises behind the group of participants is a fairly exact rendering of a part of the Marmarole Chain as Titian saw it from his window. No other painter of the period has left studies of landscape made on the spot. Titian loved heights, the precision and majesty their outlines give to a composition, their boldness, the rich colour of their rocks. Whenever the subject allowed of it, he introduced the familiar aspects of his native place and associated them with his work, notably in the famous *Death of Peter Martyr*, which I know only from Cigoli's copy in the Church of SS. Giovanni and Paolo, substituted for the original after its destruction by fire in 1867. Vasari considered it the painter's masterpiece, and the Republic of Venice forbade its sale under pain of death. Constable, the great English landscape painter, also expressed the most enthusiastic admiration for it. And, indeed, Titian never showed more genius than in the intensity with which he made Nature participate in the drama. Only a mountaineer like himself, accustomed to follow the paths which wind round wooded hill-sides, would have thought of painting this scene on an incline, and utilising the declivity for the purpose of setting trees and figures directly against the horizon. He adopted this arrangement indeed on other occasions, notably for the *S. Jerome* in the Brera, where

again we find the sloping ground and the big oak-trees that traverse the picture obliquely and stand out against the sky. All who saw the *Peter Martyr* remembered the intense emotion which breathed from the rural scene, from the branches illuminated by the miraculous appearance of the two angels bearing the palm to the martyr, from the rustling foliage, trembling, as it were, at the tragedy enacted in its shade, from the grand movement of the clouds reddened by the fiery light of dying day. Once more, Nature had proved the best and most maternal source of inspiration.

How fully I can enter into the soul and the work of the great Cadorian on this fine afternoon of early autumn, here at Pieve, breathing the good healthful smell of the country, along meadows enamelled with red clover, dark blue salvia, colchicum and buttercup. Sturdy mountaineer, who wast still painting firmly and vigorously when nearing thy hundredth year, it is here I love to evoke thee, rather than in the cold galleries of a museum, rather even than at Venice, where none will ever eclipse thy glory. It was here thou hadst thy purest joys, in the midst of these landscapes thy childish eyes gazed at so eagerly, on this soil to which thou wast attached by all the roots of thy being, in this little town where the illustrious artist of the Most Serene Republic, the familiar of the greatest men, to whom Doges, Kings, Emperors and Popes had sat, was but the son of Gregorio Vecellio. There can be no more intimate delight for a man who has reached the summit of earthly honours than to return every year to the village where he was born. Far from artificial life, he comes back to Nature, and to the land in the presence of which he need no longer play a part, and in whose sight all are equal. It was at Pieve, when reverses befell him, that Titian sought healing for his stricken soul, and gained strength for



further struggles, robust as those forest-trees to which Dante, in a magnificent image, compares the springs of the soul, those trees which raise themselves again by their own vigour after the passing of the storm :

Come la fronda, che flette la cima  
nel transito nel vento, e poi si leva  
per la propria virtù che la sublima.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of all the honours and splendours of Venice it was here, in this modest dwelling, that he felt most at home ; and he might have inscribed on it, as did Ariosto on his house at Ferrara : *Parva, sed apta mihi* (small, but suited to me).

How good is life, and how beautiful Nature ! All we need is to enjoy both without excess, in perfect equilibrium of the faculties. Mountaineers have precision both of eye and mind ; they are realists, but realists with that yearning for the ideal which the sight of peaks ever soaring heavenward inspires. We must not look to Titian for the intellectual depths of a Leonardo, or the grandiose and pathetic visions of a Michelangelo and a Rembrandt ; nor must we ask for the effusions of poets who like Correggio let their hearts sing and move us by their fervour. Titian dominates his subjects and subordinates them to his art with a calm and vigorous intelligence, a strength of will, a self-mastery which enabled him to excel in every *genre*. His physiognomy, his features, his general aspect were those of a man of action rather than an artist. He was no dreamer. We know that he was careful of his material interests, like a peasant. True, these temperaments based on practical reason do not move us as do the pure poets, do not draw us breathless after them to the regions of

<sup>1</sup> Like to the trees bowing their tops to the passage of the wind, and then rising by their own vigour which exalts them.

mystery and the infinite ; but they delight the mind without agitating it. They use art to show us the beauty of things and the joy of life. Conceived in joy, their works express and diffuse joy. Is there any better task than to teach happiness ?

But the sun has already disappeared. Only the peaks are still aglow. The Marmarole Mountains first flush rosily, then pass gradually from soft red to burning crimson, and look as if they were actually ablaze. It is twilight, the gorgeous hour d'Annunzio aptly calls the hour of Titian, "because then all things glow in rich golden tones, like the nude figures of that marvellous craftsman, and seem to illumine the sky, rather than to receive light therefrom." It was at this hour that Titian feasted his eyes on those amber reflections which hover over objects as his superb Flora's hair floats over her divine flesh. And when night fell, when the last gleam faded on the last peak of the Marmarole, he returned quietly to the old paternal house, and slept the healthy sleep of the industrious peasant.

## CHAPTER IV

### BELLUNO

THE stage-coaches which used to ply between Pieve and Belluno a few years ago, when I visited them for the first time, have made way for powerful motor-vehicles which dash along the roads with a great clanking of metal, raising whirlwinds of dust. They give no truce even for a single day to the old Cadornine forests. They

shake and break down the soil of the ancient road to Germany, the Via di Lamagna as the Italians call it, which in this particular section goes by the name of La Cavallera. Fortunately, I was able to hire one of those little light carriages owned by the well-to-do peasants of the region, and to make my pilgrimage quietly in the good sunshine, lulled by the murmur of the foaming Piave.

After leaving Pieve and Tai, the country has still the aspect of high mountain regions, and the road winds through pine-forests. A rapid descent by three bold loops brings us to Perarolo, at the confluence of the Boite, a most picturesque and pleasant situation. It is from here onward that the Piave, swelled by the waters of its tributary, is used for the transport of the famous Cadore timber, unrivalled for ship-building and famous from the earliest days. Pending the completion of a railway which is being made, the trunks of pine and larch still go to Venice by water; and it is interesting to note, all along the road, the very ingenious operations by which each of the numerous owners of trees and factories utilises the stream. But in the face of the resulting delays and complications I can understand the impatience of the Cadorians for the completion of their long promised railway.

The valley is sometimes so compressed between the mountains that there is only just room for the river and the rock-hewn road. Many inscriptions recall the fighting in these defiles in 1848. After the village of Termine, which may be said to mark the southern boundary of Cadore, the plain widens a little. The cultivated patches increase. The trees expand under the warmer sun. On the road we meet groups of young women, their faces shaded by light coloured veils, who have the robust grace of the Venetian Madonnas. An



old woman with a sharp nose and prominent chin, seated beside a basket in the open-air market at Ospitale, is exactly like the egg-seller in the foreground of the *Presentation*; and to complete the reminiscence, a little girl in a blue dress, with a thick plait of hair, has the profile of the childish Virgin who is ascending the steps of the Temple.

Towards Longarone, a gay and attractive little market-town, the mountains become lower and more distant, though the Gallina still commands the plain with its pointed beak, the shape of which varies so oddly as one approaches it. Then at the Ponte nell' Alpi, the road forks. To the left, the old German road continues; after skirting the Bosco del Gran Consiglio, whose secular trees were reserved for the fleet of the Republic, and two large ponds—that of San Croce a smiling sheet of water, that known as the Lago Morte a motionless expanse of the darkest blue—it enters Venice by Vittorio and Treviso. The road to the right is much less interesting. It goes its interminable straight way between monotonous stretches of cultivated ground under a fierce sun which makes the fresh shades of Belluno all the more agreeable to enter.

Of the Roman past of which it is proud Belluno has no traces, save a tomb discovered in the foundations of the Church of San Stefano. Nor has it many relics of the Middle Ages. Its present aspect bears the impress of the Venetian domination. The lion of S. Mark has laid his paw on everything. For nearly four centuries Belluno was the faithful handmaid of Venice. Then, lying on the boundaries of the two rivals, Austria and Italy, it underwent all the fluctuations of the fortune of war. Ardently patriotic, it was always in the van against Austria, and when the plebiscite was taken, gave itself almost unanimously to the new kingdom of

Savoy. Hatred of the black and yellow flag with the Imperial Eagle is still hot in the hearts of the Bellunese.

There is little to say of the actual town. It is a provincial centre of no special activity, a city of soldiers and officials. Its chief traffic arises from its situation at the egress from the Tyrol ; but it gives the impression of being merely a halting-place for hurried tourists. The streets are interesting, with their arcaded houses whose painted façades and windows with small carved columns recall certain corners of Venice. Two of the squares are dignified and spacious : the Piazza Campitello, the rendezvous of fashionable society, and the Piazza del Duomo, where stand the Cathedral, the Palazzo dei Rettori, and the Municipio. The last named building is modern ; in spite of its Gothic style and the rather crude red of its walls, it harmonises well enough with its neighbours. As to the Palazzo dei Rettori—now the Prefecture—it is the most remarkable structure in Belluno. Built in the early years of the Renaissance, it is ascribed to Giovanni Candi, the author of the beautiful spiral staircase of the Palazzo Contarini dal Bavolo at Venice ; the arrangement is very happy, with charming details ; the balconies are discreetly elegant ; all the capitals are different, and very well carved ; the general effect is most harmonious. But the chief attraction of Belluno is its situation at a bend of the Piave, on a sort of plateau overlooking the valley. The river, an impetuous torrent up to this point, slackens its speed to embrace the town which it seems to quit regretfully ; its slender blue ribbon may be seen for a great distance gleaming in the sun and almost disappearing in a white bed of shingle. Two mountain ranges protect Belluno, and bound its horizons : to the north, the Agordine Alps with their well-defined rocky peaks ; to the south, the wooded and cultivated hills

of the Pre-Alps which divide the valley of the Piave from the Trevisan plain.

It would be strange if an Italian city of the importance of Belluno had no local artist worthy of mention. Here in Venetia, where beauty blossoms so naturally, where the decorative instinct is in the blood, where the humblest citizen arranges his dwelling agreeably, ornamenting it with galleries and terraces, where even the peasants lay out their patches of cultivated ground harmoniously, with an eye to the prospect and the general effect, Belluno could not be an exception to the rule. Here, as in Tuscany and Umbria, there are few villages which have not a pleasant aspect and a work of art to show the stranger. How many painters and sculptors who, in other countries, would have left glorious names, are unknown here to any but students and are sometimes even forgotten, because they worked beside rivals too numerous, or too renowned !

Belluno is proud of her two Ricci, Sebastiano, the skilful decorator, who spent most of his life abroad, and his nephew Marco, an agreeable and facile landscape painter. But the glory of the town is associated above all with the name of Andrea Brustolon, whom his compatriots are fond of describing as the Phidias of wood-carvers. His fame, however, has hardly penetrated beyond his own district, though Balzac in his *Cousin Pons* speaks of a frame carved by "the famous Brustolon, the Michelangelo of wood." Burckhardt, generally so exhaustive, does not even mention the artist, nor, indeed, does he speak of any of the curiosities of the city, which, I think, he cannot have visited. Signor Corrado Ricci is more discriminating when he compares the sculptor of Belluno to Sansovino, and declares that "by his imagination, his ardour and his accomplishment he ranks above most of his contemporaries." Brustolon



belongs to that group of Venetian artists who are admirable decorators, but nothing more. When, instead of carving isolated figures of a grandiloquent and pretentious kind, they confined themselves to the adornment of churches and palaces with gilded stucco and graceful and elaborately carved furniture, they produced works the magnificence of which is unsurpassable. Tabernacles, crucifixes remarkable for the anguished expression of the Saviour, altar-colonnades, volutes loaded with clusters of fruit and foliage, the rich armorial shields of princes and bishops, furniture ornamented with fruit, animals and human figures—such specimens of Brustolon's works are scattered throughout the Tyrol and Venetia. Some of these carvings are veritable pictures in relief. The best to my mind were those in the Church of San Pietro: the *Death of S. Francis Xavier* and more especially a *Crucifixion*, in which I was struck by the noble attitude of the Virgin and by a Magdalen kneeling at the foot of the Cross, whose expression of passionate grief and love is very moving.

Until the prolongation of the line towards Pieve di Cadore is completed, Belluno is the terminus of the railway which descends quietly upon Treviso, skirting the banks of the Piave. The valley is still shut in by fairly high mountains with jagged crests, among which the most prominent is the majestic Pizzocco, with a summit resembling a Doge's cap. On a solid stone bridge we cross the terrible Cordevole, which we saw at its source near Arabba on the Dolomite road; according to a local legend the troops of Attila were checked by a sudden rise in its waters. On the way we see the Villa Colvago, where Goldoni's comic genius awoke, and where he wrote the first two of his hundred and fifty plays. After Feltre, an ancient Roman town in a pleasant position on the height, the valley narrows to a savage

defile where the Piave becomes a torrent. Then the horizon opens out again. The river once more spreads its bed of pebbles. The vines cling to the trees and hang in garlands. The houses and the farms are painted in vivid colours and sometimes adorned with frescoes. Campaniles shoot up among the trees. The great Venetian plain stretches before us as far as the eye can reach.

## CHAPTER V

### PORDENONE

It is a delightful pilgrimage across Friuli in the joy of the morning, through meadows spangled with dew. The distance is blurred by mist. The glistening highway dazzles one, like a steel ribbon unrolled in the sun.

The way is beset with memories of the Empire, and of the astounding epic of the youthful Bonaparte. Friuli and Upper Venetia are studded with towns which furnished titles for the Marshals and Generals of the glorious army. After the lapse of a century, the old exploits still live, and there is no *osteria* in this region whose walls are not adorned with engravings setting forth episodes in the battles of Arcole and Rivoli. In spite of passing clouds, the French will never be looked upon as enemies in this Italian land. And I know of no higher tribute to a conqueror.

The lofty Campanile of Pordenone emerges from the luxuriant masses of foliage that give shade to the town. Squares and avenues are planted with huge chestnuts

and planes. Monte Cavallo, already covered with snow, rears its mighty ridge on the horizon. If foreigners are rare at Udine, here they must be quite unknown, to judge by the sensation I create. There is indeed little to see in the birthplace of Pordenone, where I imagined he would be better represented. In the council-chamber of the Municipio, where the little local museum is installed, I found only a *Group of Saints*, remarkable enough in colour and handling, and a narrow fresco, which, according to the custodian, had been removed from the house inhabited by the artist; it represents a kind of rustic ballet, and is quite unlike any other work of his known to me. The same penury is to be found in the Cathedral: in the choir, there is an *Apotheosis of S. Mark*, unfinished and damaged; on a pillar two figures in poor preservation, a *S. Erasmus* and a *S. Roch*, to whom Pordenone is supposed to have given his own features; finally, on the altar of S. Joseph, a fine panel of 1515, *The Virgin enthroned between S. Christopher and S. Joseph*. The Virgin, whose mantle is spread over four donors, has a deliciously childish face, and the landscape, in which Pordenone's hand is very recognisable, is exquisitely graceful. But all this offers scanty data by which to appreciate the artist, and had I not seen his frescoes at Cremona and Piacenza, I should form a very false idea of him who aspired to rival Titian, and whose painting—brutal, violent, dramatic and disorderly—proves the truth of Buffon's dictum for artists as for writers: The style is the man. Pordenone spent his life quarrelling first with one and then with the other, including his own brother, and he probably died of poison administered by an enemy. The vigorous life and movement of his works sometimes suggest Rubens and even Michelangelo, who, it seems, thought highly of his talent. In any case, no artist of his day was more



accomplished ; it is not necessary to accept literally Vasari's story which tells how he painted a sign in a few minutes for a tradesman while the latter was at mass, but it is certain that he had extraordinary facility, and that *bravura* of the brush so essential to the fresco-painter. But we must not look for grace, or moderation, or, above all, for thought in Pordenone's work. Sometimes he imitated Giorgione, sometimes Palma, sometimes Titian ; Burckhardt justly remarks that he is always superficial, and even in his best works we miss that absorption in the theme, that renunciation of self which is the art of the great masters. He tries to amaze, and succeeds in so doing, but he does not charm. He who dreamed of eclipsing Titian survives for us mainly as the disastrous precursor of the Bolognese.

## CHAPTER VI

### UDINE

“ UDINE is a fine town,” said Chateaubriand, who was impressed mainly by the Municipio, and its portico imitated from that of the Doge's palace. The author of the *Mémoires d'outre Tombe* is right ; and I am surprised that this delightful city, the gem of Friuli, should be so little known, in spite of the attractions it can offer to its guests, an enchanting aspect, one of the most beautiful squares in Italy, an incomparable situation in the centre of the Venetian plain, good local painters and one of the finest collections of Tiepolos in the world. The German and Austrian tourists who come down to Venice by the

Pontebba line sometimes visit Udine while waiting for a train, or to spend the night ; but the French and English travellers who seek it are rare. Chateaubriand only saw it because it happened to lie on his way when he was going to Prague to rejoin Charles X. In a general way my compatriots are so fascinated by Venice that they only tear themselves away at the last moment, when they have to be making their way homeward. I myself, much as I have seen of out of the way corners of Italy, and often as I have traversed the adorable Veneto in its crimson autumn mantle, had never before made up my mind to go beyond Conegliano and take the few days necessary to visit Friuli and its capital.

This year I determined to do so. I arrived at Udine one September evening, and the next day I had the joy so dear to the real traveller, of waking up in a city quite unknown to me, but which I felt to be full of promise. The night before an omnibus with rattling windows had jolted me over the badly paved and ill-lighted streets ; I had seen the dim outlines of buildings I tried to identify by the help of my guide-book ; but on the whole, all the surprises of discovery were still before me. Of course, these are not uniformly pleasant, and often one is disappointed by one's first encounter with a city ; only by degrees does one yield to its reticent charm. But here the revelation was immediate. My arrival in the little square bathed in the morning sunshine, the climb to the Castello, and, from the high esplanade, the circular view of the immense Friulian plain spreading out in a double fan round Udine, will always be one of my most treasured memories, rich as they are in impressions of this kind.

On emerging from my hotel I had only noted a town of no very individual character, clean and animated, with wide arcaded streets and houses of the Venetian type ;

then, suddenly, at a turn in the street, I came upon the square I was seeking. I knew it was fine ; I had never supposed it would be so magnificent. Surrounded by palaces and porticoes, adorned with statues and columns, dominated by the lofty mass of the castle, from whatever point one looks at it it is eminently picturesque. Everything harmonises perfectly ; there is nothing superfluous. And yet in a very restricted space we have, on one side a 16th century *loggia* called the Loggia di San Giovanni, and the clock-tower of the same style as that of Venice ; in the middle, a fountain designed by Giovanni da Udine, two columns, one crowned by the lion of S. Mark, two figures of giants, a statue of Peace given by Napoleon I to commemorate the treaty of Campo Formio, and, of course, an equestrian statue of Victor Emmanuel ; finally, on the other side, the charming Loggia del Lionello, called after the local architect who built the town-hall in the 15th century from a design which was a very clever adaptation of the Doge's Palace. This combination, above which rise the bell-tower of the Church of Santa Maria, and the imposing walls of the Castle, is one of the most fascinating sights offered to the tourist by the little cities of Italy. Unfortunately, the Municipio was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1876 ; only the walls have survived, but we can still admire in their original state the alternate courses of red and white marble, the slender columns and their varied capitals, the little balustrade that gives so much elegance to the *loggia*, and, in a niche at the corner of the building; the Virgin carved in 1448 by Buono, the author of the Porta della Carta.

To go up to the Castello one passes under an arch designed, it is said, by Palladio ; it was formerly surmounted by the Venetian lion, as we may see in a view of the town by Palma the Younger, in the Museum. For



all this region, the Most Serene Republic was in deed that "planter of lions," spoken of by Chateaubriand in the pages he wrote in praise of Venice in September, 1833, pages which are among the finest in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*. An earthquake overthrew the old castle which used to stand on the top of the hill; it was replaced by the present building, which has been successively used for a variety of purposes; it was by turns a fortress, the residence of the Patriarchs and a prison; at present it houses various departments of the municipality and the Museum. A double staircase leads to the great hall which has been classed as a national monument in deference to its vast proportions and the remains of frescoes which still adorn its walls. Unfortunately, these old paintings have been in a very bad state ever since the time when the castle served as barracks. Soldiers, be they Italian or French, are dangerous neighbours for works of art. Udine, like Avignon, learned this by harsh experience.

In the Museum I noticed an amusing panorama of the city drawn by Callot in 1600, a delicate gray Canaletto, a little study by Veronese for his *Martyrdom of SS. Mark and Marcellinus*, and three Tiepolos. But the town is so rich in the works of this master that I do not linger over these, and I should have preferred to see local artists more fully represented here. I had some difficulty in finding a fairly good *Coronation of the Virgin*, by Girolamo da Udine. Those who wish to study the creator of the school, Martino, better known as Pellegrino da San Danielle, must leave Udine and go either to Aquileia, to see the altar-piece in the Cathedral; to San Daniele, his native town; or to Cividale, the ancient Lombard capital, which guards, together with many precious archæological treasures, the painter's masterpiece, the *Madonna di Santa Maria dei Battuti*. Here,

in the Museum of Udine, there are only *Four Evangelists* by him, so black and damaged that it is hardly possible to distinguish them.

But why should I stay shut up in these dark rooms when from the windows I catch glimpses of the superb panorama to be enjoyed from the esplanade behind the castle? I know very few vistas so vast and so magnificent. If, as tradition declares, this hill was made by Attila's orders that he might gaze from afar at the burning of Aquileia, we must admit that the barbarian was no less consummate a stage-manager than Nero. In all Italy, where from the earliest ages there has been a genius for the development of those perspectives which bring infinity within range of a town, there is no more superb position. Though the altitude is only a few yards, the spectator has the illusion of being high in space. It is a privileged situation for a capital; in the very centre of the country, it is able to overlook and keep watch on the whole of it. Friuli lies about Udine in an almost regular curve; a gigantic amphitheatre, which slopes downward very gradually from the snow-capped Alps to the green Pre-Alps, from these to the hills covered with woods and vineyards, from the hills to the gentle incline of the plain, and from the plain to the lagoons. Seen from here, the circle of the Carnic Alps forms a high, stern barrier dominated on the East by the Canino, and on the West, very far back in the direction of Gemona, by the Cogliana, the highest peak in the region. Although these heights are not quite 9,000 feet, they look imposing, viewed thus almost from the level of the sea. The first frosts of September have already covered them with snow. Two youths, who must have come down from them quite lately, gaze at them with the mournful home-sick eyes of mountaineers in a flat country. They are typical sons of Friuli,

strong and laborious, sturdier than the Venetians. At my request they name the distant peaks, and point out the more important towns we can distinguish on the river-banks, or in the folds of the hill-sides: Cividale, San Daniele, Palmanova, with its starry fortress, San Vito, Pordenone. Quite to the South are the lagoons where Aquileia and Grado slumber, and sometimes even, in clear weather, the line of the Adriatic may be seen as far as the island of Anadyomene . . . An admirable spectacle that I weary not of contemplating until the hour when the setting sun sheds over everything that "Titian light" of which Chateaubriand speaks when he compares Venice to a beautiful woman whose perfumed hair is stirred by the evening breeze, and who dies, acclaimed by all the graces and smiles of Nature . . . An admirable spectacle indeed, perhaps even more inspiring on the morrow, in the sunshine of the new day. And yet I must not linger. How can I leave Udine without having seen its Tiepolos? Nowhere can the traveller do fuller justice to the painter whose fame grows year by year, and who, to our more enlightened modern eyes, is no longer merely the delightful improvisatore, the *virtuoso* in whom all the folly of the Venetian 18th century is incarnate. I recall the chapter in which Maurice Barrès exclaims: "My comrade, my other self, is Tiepolo!" The author of *Un Homme libre*, who, no doubt, would hesitate to sign this confession of dilettantism to-day, has exaggerated the artificial side of Tiepolo. Confronted with his great compositions scattered throughout Venetia, we form a very different idea of the painter, who, far from being an artist of the decadence, a kind of Bernini of painting, was a master, not only of grace, but of health and vigour. This reputed improvisatore was a laborious worker; in proof of this we need but adduce the numerous sketches he



made for works which would seem, from their accomplished execution, to have been thrown off without effort. Artists who have a real gift never suggest the labour of creation. Camille Maclair aptly compares Tiepolo to Mozart, who seems no less facile, whereas no musical language is more learned and complex than his. It is good to show that a difficulty has been overcome; but better still to overcome it without showing that we have done so, for it is the function of genius to place before us "the marvellous result of knowledge and effort, as if it were nature itself."

Of course Tiepolo is the painter of that city and period where and when the joy of life was carried to its extreme limits; but he was also a great-grandson of the sixteenth century, of the race of great Venetian masters who had died out over a hundred years before with Tintoretto.

The Udine works are most interesting. They enable us to study the painter in the flower of his youth, in his maturity, and almost in his old age, for they were painted in 1720, 1734 and 1759 respectively. Unfortunately, the frescoes in the Cathedral have been ruined by clumsy restorations, and are of little value. In the Museum I saw a mediocre *S. Francis de Sales*, a *Meeting of the Council of the Order of Malta*, more interesting historically than artistically, and a fairly good *Angel of the Apocalypse* hovering over a fine landscape. But to recognise the real genius of Tiepolo, we must visit the episcopal palace and the Oratorio della Purità. The archiepiscopal palace, built at the beginning of the seventeenth century for the Patriarchs of Aquileia, who long claimed to rank with the Popes, is now the home of their successors, the Bishops of Udine. It was one of the last of the patriarchs, Denys Dolfino, who commissioned Tiepolo to decorate its rooms.

Individually, these frescoes are not the best painted by the artist; but their gay and luminous general effect is most pleasing to the eye. The *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, on the vault of the main staircase, is a vigorous and dramatic composition, of astonishing boldness of movement. The decoration of a ceiling was always a delight to Tiepolo; in no other *genre* did he more fully display the resources of his fancy and his imagination. The decoration of the Oratory was executed twenty-five years later. Tiepolo, less energetic now, entrusted the lateral walls to his son, and only painted the *Immaculate Conception* over the altar, and the magnificent *Assumption* of the ceiling. The latter is one of his masterpieces: nobility of invention, mastery of execution and splendour of colour are carried to the highest possible point, and in common with his distinguished biographer, Signor Pompeo Molmenti, I admire the art with which Tiepolo "preserved an unforgettable air of sweetness and grace in the midst of such a display of brilliant colours and striking ideas." Here, as before in the Cathedral at Este, I wondered at the ease with which he rose to the greatness of his subject and attuned his mind to the solemnity of the place in which he was painting, without the help of any intimate belief, as far as we can judge. Like Tintoretto before him and Delacroix after him—to quote but two examples—Tiepolo proves that the genius of an artist may sometimes rise to the beauty of religious poetry without the aid of faith.

## CHAPTER VII

## AQUILEIA

THIS decaying town, to which the war has given a momentary importance, was an important Roman city. Was it really, as we are told, over twelve miles in circumference, and had it 600,000 inhabitants? I know not. But be this as it may, the "second Rome" as it was called, the favourite residence of Augustus, the concentration camp of the army, the naval base, the *splendidissima colonia* of the Empire was a genuine capital. But, ravaged by Attila, supplanted by Grado and Venice, which demolished most of its buildings in order to construct their own, and gradually forced inland by the alluvial deposits of the Isonzo and the Natisone, it almost disappeared from the map.

Its Cathedral survives to bear witness to its former splendour, and here we may read the record of its vicissitudes. The magnificent mosaic, discovered by accident some years ago, is all that remains of the original basilica. Some workmen, digging to discover the source of a leak, laid bare the most important mosaic of the fourth century, about three feet below the nave. It was unskilfully repaired by the Austrians, and Ugo Ojetti is now engaged upon a more perfect restoration; he drew my attention to the variety and richness of the ornamentation: decorative friezes, heads, animals, picturesque scenes, Victories with outspread wings, etc.

On these earlier foundations a Romanesque church was built at the beginning of the eleventh century; the choir and the transept vaults still exist. The nave



was destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt about 1380 ; the Gothic arches rested on the ancient columns, the capitals of which were raised when necessary. The decoration was due to the Venetian Renaissance, notably the fine pulpit in the style of the Lombardi, placed exactly in front of the choir, in the central axis of the church. The new priest, the learned archæologist Celso Costantini, explained to me how much this arrangement is appreciated by the preacher, who is thus enabled to face his entire audience. Four large Austrian shells are placed on the pulpit, recalling the recent drama.

One might linger long in this church ; there are some interesting old frescoes in the choir and a good picture by Pellegrino da San Daniele ; the crypt is decorated with paintings of the thirteenth century. But time presses, and I am anxious to visit the Museum, on the door of which *Museo Nazionale* is already inscribed. The entrance is under a colonnade shaded by wisteria in blossom. Cypressess, laurels, pines and magnolias make a delicious setting in which it should be easy to forget the horrors so lately witnessed.

The peace of the Museum, slumbering in the midst of its beautiful garden, was rudely disturbed a few days before the declaration of war. On April 27, 1915, Austrian officials carried off some 600 of the most valuable smaller objects, coins, ambers and bronzes ; but to avoid alarming the population they left all the sculpture, with the exception of the bust of the Empress Livia. In spite of these depredations, the Museum is very rich, and it would take several days to explore it thoroughly. Its great attraction is that it is purely local ; no object from outside is admitted. Statues, tombs, medals and jewels were all found at Aquileia, and this gives us a good idea of the importance of the Roman city.

The Museum is especially rich in relics of the time of Augustus, who made the city a sort of headquarters whence he controlled the operations of the legions commanded by his sons-in-law, Tiberius and Drusus. Suetonius declares that he had chosen Aquileia *ut bellis Pannonicis atque Germanicis aut interveniret aut non longe abesset*.<sup>1</sup>

Strangely indeed does history repeat itself, bringing together within a few miles the headquarters of a Roman Emperor and of a King of Italy in the eternal struggle of the Latins against the northern barbarians. The soldiers who fell on the Carso and the Isonzo sleep near the funereal monuments of the Imperial legionaries.

Aquileia never forgot its debt to Augustus, and piously preserved the portraits of his family. Though the bust of his wife has disappeared, there are statues in the Museum of the Emperor as a young man, of Tiberius and of Claudius.

After this brilliant period when the Empire extended as far as the Danube, the military importance of Aquileia declined; but the town then entered upon a period of economic prosperity which lasted until the fourth century, when Bishop Theodore built the basilica of which all that remains is the mosaic lately discovered.

Systematic excavation would no doubt reveal other marvels; this will be the task of the new authorities. I think there is a great future for Aquileia among the many artistic towns of Italy.

Before leaving for Udine, I pass into the burial ground which surrounds the church. Noble cypresses seem to be lifting a prayer to heaven. Between their trunks are the graves of soldiers who fell in the first battles. The surroundings are deeply impressive, and I can

<sup>1</sup> In order not to be remote from the Pannonian and Germanic wars.



PIAZZA DEL DUOMO, TRENTO.





understand how they must have inspired d'Annunzio, who made a speech here on All Saints' Day last year. At the request of Ugo Ojetti the city of Florence sent young plants of laurel and rose to relieve the gloom of the yews by their crimson and heroic note. Aquileia is no longer the weeping woman depicted by Carducci :

Passa come un sospir su'l Garda argenteo :  
é pianto d'Aquileia su per le solitudini.<sup>1</sup>

The famous Quando ? (When ?) of the *Salut Italique* is no longer asked in this case. The ancient city of Augustus was restored to Italy a year ago.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TRENT AND TRIESTE "REDEEMED."

THEY are delivered at last, those *irredente* (unredeemed) territories, now *redente*, for the recovery of which Italy declared war on her ancient ally, and ranged herself by our side.

La primavera in fior mena tedeschi.

"Springtime with its flowers brings us the Germans," sighed Carducci. But the glorious autumn of this year has seen them hurrying back over the mountains faster than they came down from them. What enthusiasm must be lifting up all hearts in the Trentino, whose roads are dotted with columns commemorating the heroic struggle against the eternal enemy, and in Friuli, where the name of Giovanni Battista Cella is still

<sup>1</sup> A sigh seemed to pass over silvery Garda : it is the lament of Aquileia above in the solitudes.

cherished, that Cella whose bust is in the *loggia* at Udine, and whom Garibaldi called the bravest of the brave, *prode fra i prodi*. What joy throughout the whole peninsula! And what joy too among those who have long loved Italy!

A few months ago, at the end of a lecture I gave at the Sorbonne, I ended with the wish that soon—not this year, I said, but next year—I might be able to travel over the Dolomite road again and *find it Italian throughout*. I did not think my wish would be so quickly granted, nor that I should so soon be able to triumph over a Viennese critic who once laughed at me for giving their Italian names to regions which he assured me were “politically and permanently Austrian.” And now the barbarians have been driven out of Titian’s country. All the bells of Cadore must be celebrating the Italian victory. Trent, the chief town of the Department of the Upper Adige, has become the capital of the seventieth province of Italy.

The Austrians are said to have laid a mine under the monument to Dante in one of the squares of Trent, meaning on their retreat to blow up a memorial which proclaimed publicly, almost provocatively, the *irredentism* of the town and of the province. They had not forgotten the verses written by Carducci in 1906, at the time of its inauguration:

Dante si spazia da ben cinquecento  
Anni de l’Alpi su’l tremendo spatto  
Ed or s’è fermo, e par ch’ aspetti, a Trento. . . .<sup>1</sup>

For what, if not for the liberation, the expulsion of the barbarians, the flight of the usurpers to the other side of the mountains, to the pine-forests of Germany,

<sup>1</sup> Dante has been wandering for five hundred years on the terrible slopes of the Alps, and now he halts and seems to be waiting at Trent. . . .



where, as Chateaubriand said, the very sun has “an evil face.” Let us hope that the flight was so precipitate that there was no time to destroy the statue.

In any case, the Austrian officers will no longer amuse themselves by firing their pistols at it. A free and joyous people now lays flowers at its feet. Dante is no longer listening anxiously on his high stone pedestal. . . . What he hears now is the murmur of thousands of voices repeating the prophetic verses in which, six hundred years ago, he fixed the natural frontiers of Italy north of Trent and east of Istria, as far as the Gulf of Quarnero “which bounds Italy and bathes her frontier.”

And I think, too, of that spring day in war-time, when I gazed on the other hostage city from a tower at Grado, on a little island of the Adriatic lagoon, from which the Italians had driven the Austrians at the beginning of hostilities. After breakfasting in the naval officers’ mess, I went, in company with two French sub-lieutenants—aviators who have covered themselves with glory—to the belvedere whence the enemy coast could be seen. With what a thrill of emotion I saw before me. Trieste, lying indolently along the shore at the foot of those hills which make such a dark and stately setting for the light tints of its houses. With a field-glass I was able to distinguish the principal buildings of the Tergeste of Augustus, where everything speaks eloquently of Roman power and the glory of the lion of S. Mark. Here again Carducci’s verses rose to my lips, and I repeated the famous “Quando ?” of his *Salut Italique*.

\* \* \* \* \*

The long expected answer to this “Quando ?” has at last been given by the historic communiqué from

General Diaz : " Our troops have occupied Trent and have landed at Trieste. The Italian tricolour is flying over the Castello de Buon Consiglio and over San Giusto." What a sudden and splendid realisation in un hoped for conditions of the burning message which fell from the skies one morning last year, when Gabriele d'Annunzio threw down these prophetic words to the inhabitants of Trieste from his aeroplane :

" Brothers, take courage ! I tell you, I swear to you that the Italian flag shall be hoisted over the great arsenal, on the top of San Giusto. Courage and endurance ! The end of your martyrdom is at hand ! The dawn of joy is even now reddening. Hovering over you on these Italian wings, I throw down my heart and this message to you in earnest of my promise."

The day has come. The Italian flag floats over the arsenal and San Giusto, as the poet foretold in his superb *Ode on the Latin Resurrection*, written at the beginning of the war. Italy will be able to grave the blazon of the House of Savoy " on the stone of Roman Pola, on the Adriatic restored to the Lion."

The windows of Trieste are a-flutter with the banners prepared by her people in silence, in the secrecy of their homes and the passion of their hearts.

THE END.

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